DAVID BOWIE THE MAKING OF *THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD*

RUSH GEDDY LEE TELLS ALL

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★CLASSIC★ ROCK

"I've always had rock'n'roll in my soul"

DOLLY PARTON

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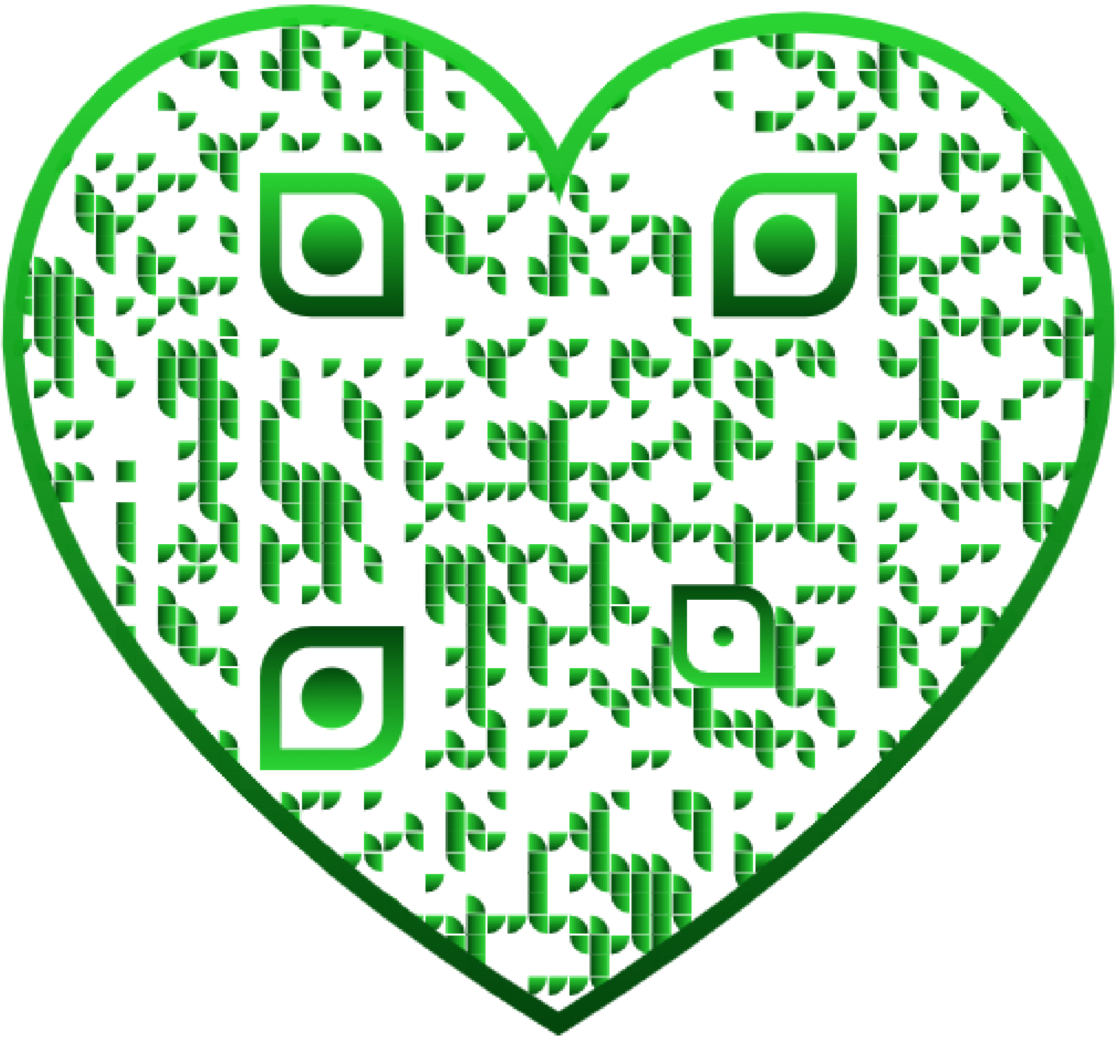
THE QUEEN OF COUNTRY ON ASSEMBLING ROCK'S A-LIST FOR THE UNEXPECTED EVENT OF THE YEAR

FUTURE
ISSUE 321



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Contents

DECEMBER 2023 **ISSUE 321**

VIJAT MOHINDRA, COURTESY OF BUTTERFLY RECORDS

8 The Dirt
Tony Iommi jams with Black Sabbath – The Ballet... Bruce Dickinson and Judas Priest release new albums in 2024... Welcome back The Wanton Bishops and Graveyard... Say hello to Green Lung and Michael Catton... Say goodbye to John Marshall, Kent Stax, Roger Whittaker, Ron Howden...

16 The Stories Behind The Songs
ZZ Top

18 Q&A
Chris Shiflett

Cover Feature
20 Dolly Parton
The Queen Of Country talks about her new rock album and the *Who's Who* of rock royalty who appear on it, and looks back over her extraordinary life.

30 Geddy Lee
Ahead of the publication of his autobiography, he talks about some of the events and people who have helped shape his life.

36 The Struts
There have been wild nights, bad decisions, imposter syndrome and much more, but The Struts never stopped wanting to be the biggest and the best.

42 Duff McKagan
His new album might be a long way from the music he's best known for, but he says it still reflects the punk rocker in him.

44 David Bowie
In 1970 he was a one-hit wonder. His album *The Man Who Sold The World* helped him recalibrate his sound and vision.

50 Brothers Osborne
Having weathered a few years of personal disclosures, their new album celebrates freedom and inclusiveness.

54 Guns N' Roses
Thirty years ago, they released *The Spaghetti Incident?*, an album of covers. We take a look at the originals that fired up Axl and co.

62 Ever Meet Lemmy?
The Gaslight Anthem

66 The Hot List
We look at some of the essential new tracks you need to hear and the artists to have on your radar. This month they include REWS, Low Cut Connie, Dogma, Rose Tiger and more...

71 Reviews
New albums from The Struts, The Gaslight Anthem, Stray, The Cadillac Three, Van Morrison, Alabama 3, Foghat, Phil Manzanera & Andy Mackay, King Crimson,... Reissues from Nirvana, Muse, Motörhead, Thunder, Bush, Frank Zappa, Jimi Hendrix, Whitesnake, Mötley Crüe, Christine McVie... DVDs, films and books on Queen, Geddy Lee, George Harrison, The Who, The Police, John Coghlan... Live reviews of AC/DC, Rival Sons, Muse, Glenn Hughes, Hawkwind...

91 Live
We preview tours by The Almighty, Phil Campbell & The Bastard Sons and Uli Jon Roth. Plus gig listings – who's playing where and when.

88 Buyer's Guide
Clutch

106 The Soundtrack Of My Life
KK Downing

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The Queen Of Country? On the cover of *Classic Rock*?! Hell yeah! Full disclosure: I'm a long-time Dolly Parton fan, but never in a million years did I think that we'd ever have the opportunity to legitimately put her on the cover of *Classic Rock*. But sometimes the world really does manage to surprise you.

Those who are partial to Ms Parton's charms know all too well that she's been a rock star all along, but this year she has gone one louder and firmly cemented her high-voltage rock'n'roll credentials. A nomination for the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame (an accolade she initially wanted to decline, as she didn't feel she deserved it) began a series of events that resulted in her new album *Rockstar*. And her collaborators on its 30 (yes 30!) tracks truly read like a *Who's Who* of rock's great and good. Dolly (and some of those collaborators) tell us all about it.

It's not just Dolly's album that's rock star-studded, though, elsewhere in this issue you'll find Rush, Guns N' Roses, The Struts, David Bowie and so much more.

Until next month...

Siân

Siân Llewellyn, Editor

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This month's contributors

JAMES ISAACS
Former *Classic Rock* and *Metal Hammer* art wizard James now heads up his own design agency, Black Finch Design, boasting such clients as Iggy Pop, the Manics, Iron Maiden and Motörhead. When he's not pushing around bits of paper and contemplating font trends, he can be found worshipping at the altar of Clutch. His musings on the band's back catalogue can be found in this month's Buyer's Guide (p88).

PAUL ELLIOTT
Paul interviewed Geddy Lee for this month's issue, 40 years after he first saw Rush play live on the *Signals* tour. He has interviewed the members of Rush many times over the years, including a rare audience with Neil Peart in 2012. This latest conversation with Geddy, revolving around his autobiography *My Effin' Life* (p30), proved to be the most revealing of then all.

ROB HUGHES
When it comes to country music, Rob has interviewed some big names. But none of them compare to Dolly Parton, who he finally cornered for this month's cover story (p20). She even graced him with a new nickname, which he won't bloody shut up about now. Aside from writing for *CR*, Rob also co-hosts the *Parallel Universe* podcast with 6Music DJ Marc Riley: patreon.com/ParallelUniversePodcast

CLASSIC ROCK

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Thanks this issue to Eva Garis (layout), Sam Williams at Magictorch (cover magic), Steve Mitchell (typography), Dan Foreman and Noel Allen (image manipulation)

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future.
Distributed by Marketforce, 2nd Floor, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU.
For enquiries please email mfcommunications@futurenet.com **ISSN** 1464783

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INSIDE THE WORLD OF ROCK

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It is big, and it is clever: at the Sphere in Las Vegas, U2 deliver the first experience of a new era of concert production.

U2 Take Live Music Into The Future

Mind-blowing, but does the multibillion-dollar Sphere's 'multi-sensory' experience threaten gigs as we know them?

On September 29, U2 made headlines around the world with the opening night of a 25-show residency at the Sphere, a new, state-of-the-art venue in Las Vegas. Not for the first time, the band were bringing cutting-edge audio and visual technology to the art of live performance. And to call the results eye-catching would be an understatement.

Built at a cost of $2.3 billion by the owners of New York's Madison Square Garden, the Sphere boasts something called 'spacial sound', using 168,000 speakers to make the audience feel as though they are 'inside' the music. Its stunning visuals employ a wraparound 160,000-square-foot LED display made up of more than 268 million video pixels.

U2 and their team had spent two years planning the shows, based on an in-its-entirety celebration of their 1991 album *Achtung Baby*. Much of the detail of the presentation was conceived by the band's creative director Willie Williams, the man responsible for designing every U2 show for the past 40 years.

"The Sphere is like no other venue," Williams tells *Classic Rock* during the residency's second night. "Physically speaking it's quite big [seated capacity is 18,600], but it's also oddly intimate; it's O2 Arena-sized, not Wembley Arena-sized, and it's like an amphitheatre, with the seating raised to face the stage."

Of the similarly cutting-edge audio, Williams says: "Because it's comprised of many tiny speakers, the upshot is that there's a delay of a hundredth of a millisecond. That's not much, but if you're standing on the floor you can hear directly what's coming from the stage. Correcting that was tricky, but there were a lot of challenges to resolve. There's a quiet part during the middle of the show where Bono speaks – whispers, even – and he's intelligible even from the back rows."

@FLYBYCHICAGO; MARCO BRAMBILLA; RICH FURY x2

With 90 per cent of the audio system hidden behind the LED screen, there's no sense of where the sound emanates from.

"I'd say one hundred per cent. You can't see anything," Williams responds. "For me, after years of having to work around ugly big boxes, that's fantastic. But you don't think about the sound because, it's everywhere."

Besides the audio and visual components, the Sphere's full 'immersive experience' can be multi-sensory, with smells emitted and 10,000 seats vibrating where appropriate. "The smells are more for movies," Williams explains. "At our show the seats weren't used, as everybody stood up."

Williams admits to having doubts when U2 were first approached to play the Sphere. "Some of that is because I don't really like Vegas," he says with a chuckle. "But despite all of my experience [of past decades] it felt worrying to be the first band in a brand new building and using a screen that someone else had designed. Conversely, being the first, we also had a completely blank canvas."

Did it feel like with this new technology there were almost too many possibilities?

"Absolutely, yes. But I feel like we ended up with a very coherent show. Using these super-sound systems there's a real discipline about the way U2 work. We really had to decide quite early on about the lights that we wanted. That helped us to avoid getting overwhelmed by it all."

So here's the million-dollar question: given the sheer scale of the Sphere experience, is there a danger of bands being dwarfed by the presentation?

"With U2 we have always tried to get the best of both sides: the music and the presentation. They are confident enough to embrace it. What we try to present is spectacle *and* intimacy. We want to show people what they've never seen before. But U2 don't even need [the technology], they use it because they love it."

So let's rephrase the question. For a band that isn't U2, if and when this becomes more widespread could it render the music secondary?

"I think it's already happening via existing productions," Williams says. "This could certainly exacerbate that. Balancing the magic the way U2 do looks easy, but it's very, very difficult. Many artists could potentially get completely overwhelmed."

Days later, when asked by journalist Steven Levy of the website Wired about such a possibility, U2 guitarist The Edge replied: "I don't worry. We're pushing the envelope in the visual area as far as you can. All the artists we worked with have given us incredible material that we feel really connects with our music. But in the end the songs dictate what we put on the screen and what we do as a band in performance. That's still the core of this event. Without the music it would be an empty spectacle."

Clearly, with plans existing for the company behind the Sphere to open a sister venue in East London that would stand as tall as Big Ben at nearly 300 feet and be almost 400 feet in diameter, concert production, at least for the biggest of big artists, is entering a new era.

"The pitchforks of the locals might prevent that," Williams states, referring to stern opposition from the venue's proposed neighbours. "It's too early for me to say how I feel about [the spread of such futuristic venues]. The Sphere works in Las Vegas because it's as big and as bold as everything in that city. But is it right for London? I don't know. We'll let the locals decide." **DL**

This month The Dirt was compiled by Bill DeMain, Polly Glass, Rich Hobson, Hannah May Kilroy, Dave Ling, Henry Yates

RIP

Thank you... and good night.

John Marshall
August 28, 1941 – September 16, 2023

Middlesex-born John Marshall was the drummer with jazz-meets-proggers Soft Machine from 1972 to '78, and also played drums with many other artists including Jack Bruce, Arthur Brown and John McLaughlin. Marshall was 82 years old. A tribute by *Prog* magazine's Sid Smith said: "Marshall brought swing, subtlety, groove and fireworks whenever the occasion demanded."

Ron Howden
January 5, 1945 – September 29, 2023

The drummer with veteran progressive rock band Nektar, Ron Howden, has died at the age of 78 following years of health issues, including cancer. Although their members were English, Nektar formed in Hamburg in 1969. "I cannot imagine a world without Ron in it," said the band's rhythm section partner, bassist Derek 'Mo' Moore.

Kent Stax
Died September 20, 2023

The drummer with Washington-based hardcore crew Scream, whose line-up included future Nirvana and Foo Fighters man Dave Grohl over two spells, has died at the age of 61, just one day after the band shared their first new music in more than a decade. Stax had been suffering from metastatic cancer. A statement from band mainstays Pete and Franz Stahl described Stax as "the original heartbeat of Scream".

Paul Woseen
Died September 15, 2023

Australian veterans the Screaming Jets are mourning the loss of their bassist and co-founder Paul Woseen, who died suddenly during the build up to a national tour. He was 56. A couple of days later they announced: "This still feels like some crazy nightmare." Declaring an intention to continue, the band added: "We are grateful for your patience as we start to figure out how to move forward."

John Davis
Died September 13, 2023

John Davis, the highly respected audio mastering engineer who collaborated extensively with Jimmy Page on the remastering of the Led Zeppelin catalogue between 2014 and 2016, has died aged 63 following a short illness. Davis, who Page once descibed as "a master of his craft", also worked with Primal Scream, U2, The Stone Roses, Nick Cave, The Prodigy, Noel Gallagher and many others.

Terry Kirkman
December 12, 1939 – September 23, 2023

Kansas native Terry Kirkman was a member of 60s vocal group The Association, whose hits included the 1966 US No.1 *Cherish*. The 83-year-old died of congestive heart failure.

Roger Whittaker
March 22, 1936 – September 13, 2023

Kenyan-born singer-songwriter and expert whistler Roger Whittaker (pictured) had hits including *Durham Town* and *The Last Farewell*, and sold almost 50 million records. He retired from music in 2012 and was 87 at the time of his passing.

Jon Kennedy
Died September 25, 2023

Jon Kennedy, temporary bassist with Cradle Of Filth, has died in a car crash in Wales. He was 44. Band leader Dani Filth described Kennedy as "a great bassist and singer".

Ron Haffkine
December 13, 1938 – October 1, 2023

New Yorker Ron Haffkine was a producer and manager of Dr Hook & The Medicine Show, and worked on their biggest hits including *Sylvia's Mother* and *When You're In Love With A Beautiful Woman*. He was 84 years old when he died from leukaemia and kidney failure.

Stephen Ackles
February 15, 1966 – September 28, 2023

Norwegian Stephen Ackles played piano with Elton John, Johnny Cash, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis among others. The 57-year-old was found dead at his home in Langhus.

WELCOME BACK

The Wanton Bishops

Nader Mansour on giving up screaming, dating wild women and the insecurity of musicians.

Evolution can be a dirty word in the blues genre. But while Lebanese duo Nader Mansour (vocals) and Eddy Ghossein (guitar) set out throwing traditional shapes on The Wanton Bishops' 2012 debut *Sleep With The Lights On*, Ghossein's exit has seen the singer stir in electronica, Eastern motifs and processed vocals. "I never promised you blues," Mansour says of new album *Under The Sun*. "I promised you honesty."

Presumably you're you pleased with *Under The Sun*?
Yeah. As much as you say you don't care what everyone thinks, that's a lie. We're the most insecure species out there, musicians. We need that validation. Love me, love me, love me, if you please.

> "Listening to this album might induce nightmares."

What do you mean when you say you're "finally getting to the core of the music I want to make"?
I started with the blues because it was accessible. They built a whole culture around those three chords, and for a non-musician, back then, it was like, okay, I'll learn these chords then I'm in. Maybe mess with the sound, make it more electric, more violent. But ten years teaches you a lot, and it put me on the road to my origins, those being oriental music. At the same time, I was DJ-ing and doing a lot of electronic music. And at some point I discovered I can actually sing, versus screaming.

How has your fan base reacted?
Some people were saying: "You're selling out, going for something that's not blues". I was like: "Dude, as a matter of fact it was harder to sell this to agents". Everyone wanted me to do another blues record. I'm grateful to whoever listened to us, but please, at no point come and tell me this is not the sound of The Wanton Bishops. I am The Wanton Bishops. So if I wake up and I want to do a reggae record, I'll do it.

What time of the day should we listen to this album?
You definitely shouldn't listen before sleeping. It might induce nightmares. I'm very critical of the society we live in and that I'm part of, so I'm part of the problem. It's like holding up a mirror and not liking what you see.

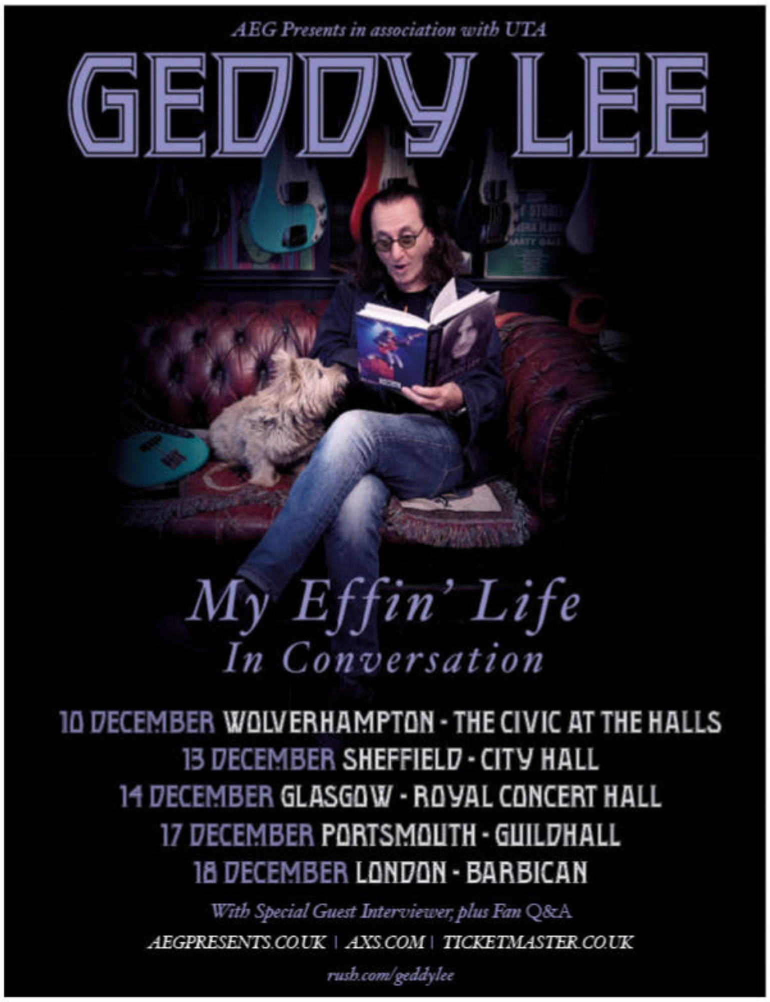
***Don't You Touch The Radio* is the heaviest song you've ever done.**
We looked at the record and it was a little too colourful, psychedelic and electronic. Everyone was like: "Dude, what about a straight rock'n'roll banger to remind us of the old-school Wanton Bishops?" I was like, alright, let's knock one out. One chord. No chord changes. At the same time, I was seeing this much younger lady. She was much more rock'n'roll than me. That's where the lyric came from. She was asking me to be wild, and I was like: "Can I sleep?" So it's an ode to ageing rock'n'rollers.

Why did that relationship end, was she too much for you?
No, actually I ended up being a little too much – but on the monogamous side. She wanted wild, but she wanted wild for herself.

The song *Beirut* is a love letter to your troubled home city. Wouldn't it make your life as a musician easier if you moved abroad?
I tried it. I went to Paris. But I woke up one day and I was like: "What the hell am I doing here? Everything is working. Everything is fantastic." My country might be in shambles right now, but I'm the king of these shambles. **HY**

Under The Sun is out now via Gnu Roam/Kartel Music Group.

ROGER WHITTAKER: GETTY; WANTON BISHOPS: SAMA BEYDOUN/PRESS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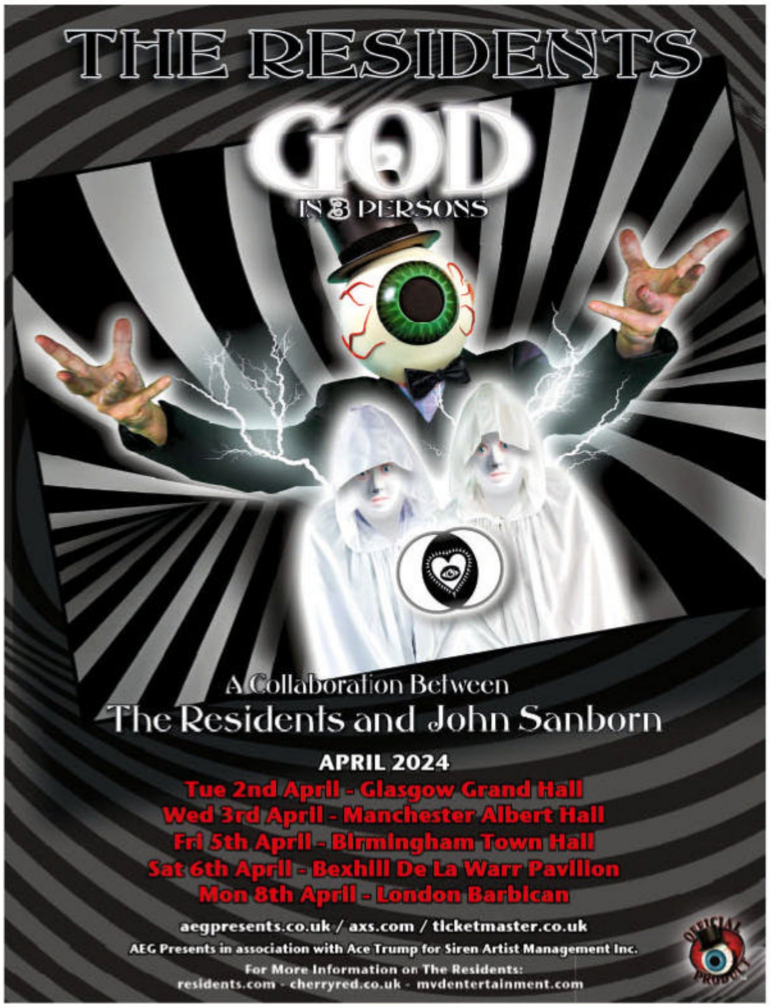
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OFFICIAL PRODUCT

New Bruce Dickinson And Priest Albums

Bruce cagey with details; Tipton guests on Priest's.

Bruce Dickinson and Judas Priest release new albums early next year. *The Mandrake Project is* Iron Maiden singer Dickinson's seventh solo record and his first full solo project in almost two decades. No date has been announced, but it will be released via Sony BMG.

"It's finally happening," Dickinson said in a video clip. "Of course, it's music. But it's also much, much more. More than that I'm not gonna reveal for now, because it will become self-explanatory as we reveal more layers of the onion."

Dickinson has solo dates in Mexico and Brazil in the spring, and will appear at the Mystic Festival in Poland. Further shows are to be confirmed.

Judas Priest's nineteenth studio album, *Invincible Shield* was produced by guitarist Andy Sneap and features contributions from guitarist Glenn Tipton. It's released on March 8 via Sony Music. A new single, *Panic Attack*, is available now. **DL**

Bruce Dickinson: new project is "much, much more" than just music.

Iommi Jams With Black Sabbath Ballet

"This is so out there, it's wonderful", says Sharon

Tony Iommi made a surprise guest appearance on stage at the Hippodrome in Birmingham on the opening night of *Black Sabbath – The Ballet*. Iommi contributed guitar to the evening's final number, which features Sabbath's evergreen *Paranoid*, and at the end took a bow with the cast and crew. "I'm honoured to be involved with these talented dancers," Iommi said, "[but] I'm afraid I won't be joining every performance." The show was also attended by Geezer Butler, Sharon Osbourne, Robert Plant and Bev Bevan.

Sharon Osbourne later commented: "Who would have thought the combination? This is just so out-there that it's wonderful."

Sharon is working on a museum of Ozzy Osbourne memorabilia in Birmingham that will include "all of Ozzy's awards, his stage clothes, posters, old posters from Earth days". **DL**

NEWS

Bob Geldof has given his approval to a stage musical of 1985's **Live Aid** all-star fundraiser. *Just For One Day* will run from January 26 to March 30 at London's Old Vic Theatre. The Band Aid Charitable Trust is set to receive 10 per cent of proceeds from ticket sales.

David Coverdale says **Whitesnake** still exist as a band and they continue to receive "offers" to perform live, although he won't "entertain anything until I get my physical aspect together". In addition to the challenges that forced the cancellation of a tour in 2022, Coverdale recently damaged both shoulders in a fall and also suffers from arthritis.

The open-top 1953 Bristol KSW double-decker bus used by Paul McCartney and **Wings** on the band's 1972 tour is to be auctioned in the United States. Fully restored by a workshop in Essex after being discovered in Spain in a state of dilapidation, the vehicle's value is expected to be between 200,000 and 300,000 US dollars (£163,000 and £245,000).

A new album from **Bernie Marsden** (pictured) is released on November 24 via Conquest Music. The late guitarist (who passed away in August) completed *Working Man*, overseeing its artwork and mastering, during his final weeks. "Bernie was eager to get the album out, and we want to follow his wishes and release it as planned," says his widow Fran.

WELCOME BACK

Graveyard

The retro-rocking Swedes return with a "contemplative" new album with isolation-themed lyrics.

Swedish hard rockers Graveyard have been part of the retro-rock revival since 2006 with their potent mix of heavy blues, 70s swagger and gritty rock'n'roll. After a brief split in 2017, they re-formed after just a few months and in 2018 released *Peace*. Now, five years on, they're back with their new, sixth album, appropriately titled 6, a dynamic, bluesy trip that's rich in introspection.

It's five years since your last album. What's been going on in Graveyard's world in that time?

The first two of those five years we were touring. The last tour we did [before covid] was with Clutch in Europe, and then we did a tour in the US with Opeth. The plan all along was to start recording and writing songs after that tour, but we weren't able to just focus on writing music. It took a little longer than we were hoping.

Did covid delay everything?

I guess. I mean, everyone got covid at different points during the period, so we had to wait that out. But not really, except that we couldn't play and make money. We didn't have any lockdowns here in Sweden, so we were kind of free to do what we wanted.

The new album was recorded in two studios, one being Silence studio which is in a tiny rural village in one of the darkest parts of Sweden. What made you decide to do that?

We started out by going away to the forests in Sweden to Silence studio for about a week. The original Silence studio was also a record company that released a lot of Swedish prog albums back in the day. I think going there was about focus – being away from normal life, where we could just focus on writing. But it wasn't possible to do that for a long period, with family stuff and things back home. So the rest of the album we did in our producer's studio.

What inspired 6 lyrically?

It's mostly Jonatan Larocca-Ramm [guitar] and Truls Mörck [bass] who wrote the lyrics, and the ones Truls wrote are about isolation. Not to do with the pandemic, but more the isolation of your thoughts. And it's the same for Jonatan: to do with darker feelings that are inside. But I don't think it's a darker album; it's more a contemplative album.

"We wanted 6 to be more of a guitar-driven album."

What did you want to do musically with the album?

The only thing we discussed before was that we wanted more of a guitar-driven album. The last one, *Peace*, was a little more focused on rhythm and bass – most of the songs on that album were done by Truls, our bass player. The songs on 6 were done by me and Jonatan, the guitarists in the band, so it was natural that it was gonna be more focused on guitars.

You've done some amazing tours over the years, with bands including Motörhead and Soundgarden. Have you ever been star-struck?

I don't get star-struck. It's just people. Although… I did get a little bit star-struck when I met Mark Lanegan. We were in Finland, and there were these saunas right in the backstage area. I had just got out of the sauna, with a towel wrapped around me, and I met Mark Lanegan outside. I had a little talk with him, and I just couldn't find the words. It was the only time I've been star-struck. It was an awkward situation, too, with me being kind of naked. **HMK**

6 is out now via Nuclear Blast.

BRUCE DICKINSON: JOHN McMURTRIE; BERNIE MARSDEN: JOBY SESSIONS

"Stories can change people's lives, and that's what I hope Green Lung does."

★ HIGH HOPES

Green Lung

Horror theatricality and Zeppelin-style folk diversify the doom diet beyond Sabbath alone.

After two albums of folk-tinged, riff-driven doom, London-based Green Lung have stumbled on a formula for infernal success – and they didn't even need to hang about a crossroads at midnight to get there.

"Maybe one," vocalist Tom Templar muses. "Scott [Black, guitars] and I went up to Dartmoor recently, and there was a crossroads where a woman had been murdered, so we figured we should write a song about it. We haven't had to take the devil's bargain just yet."

Faustian bargains or not, Green Lung have become a cult sensation over the past couple of years, drawing massive audiences everywhere from Bloodstock to Download, Roadburn to Desertfest. For their set at the latter in 2022 the 500-capacity Underworld filled long before they were due on stage.

"Desertfest is such a spiritually important place for us," Templar says, adding that the band "effectively got together" there in 2017.

Rather than dedicate themselves mindlessly to the Sabbath template, Green Lung embraced ye olde English sensibilities on 2019's *Woodland Rites* and 2021 follow-up *Black Harvest*, conjuring the spirit of Led Zeppelin, Blue Cheer and other primordial metal influences in the process. New album *This Heathen Land* is another beast entirely, swapping quaint folk-horror for a big-budget spookfest, à la Ghost.

Refreshingly unrestrained, *This Heathen Land* delights in shifting dials, from the menacing occult rock of *This Forest Church* to the trad doom of *One For Sorrow*, to minimalistic folk with *Song Of The Stones*, to gothic pop-metal with *Maxine*.

As much fun as Green Lung have had stylistically on *This Heathen Land*, it's the songs' subject matter that fires up Templar the most. While keen to stress that it isn't quite a concept record, the songs are all linked thematically, with Templar using his knowledge of spooky locales to explore supernatural happenings. "When I was twelve I found this book called *Witches And Sorcerers*. It had a picture of a woman with a pentagram on her back. After that I collected everything I could find in the second-hand bookstores of rural Norfolk."

For all his love of the occult, Templar has no Geezer Butler-style stories of dabbling in the dark arts himself. "I'm more of a fascinated observer," he admits. "I could never truly commit to one idea or religion, because I'm equally fascinated by them all. I want to read old Norse texts and find out what the Vikings believed, as I do what Gerald Gardner was up to with the Bricket Wood Coven. But I definitely believe in the Alan Moore understanding of magic, where creative practice becomes something more than just creativity. Stories can change people's lives in a real way, and that's what I hope Green Lung does." **RH**

This Heathen Land is out now via Nuclear Blast. Green Lung's UK tour begins on November 22 in Glasgow.

FOR FANS OF...

Wherever stoner/doom treads, references to British horror surely can't be far behind.

"Green Lung is a love letter to the occult explosion of the late 60s and 70s," Templar says. "*The Wicker Man* is quite twee and pastoral, very English and eccentric, things I'd like us to be. It's so celebratory that you side with the bad guys."

ANDY FORD/PRESS

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> **"The plan when I started this with Soren was to go back to that *Van Halen I* album."**

★ HIGH HOPES

Michael Catton

Meet the British/Danish rock singer with Iron Maiden in his veins and the 80s in his music.

If Steven Tyler and David Coverdale co-fathered a child, it might have been Michael Catton. Armed with a microphone, the softly spoken 32-year-old transforms into the sort of rock singer you didn't think existed any more – a flamboyant, joyously larynx-shredding force built by years on the grass-roots scene of his native Denmark.

Observers of that scene may recall his old band Tainted Lady, but it's Catton's solo debut, *Point Of No Return*, that really shows what he's made of. Co-masterminded with Glenn Hughes guitarist Soren Andersen, it's stuffed with ear-worms that call to mind the 80s at their brightest and riffiest – music that Catton has adored since his teens. "I was really into eighties glam bands like Whitesnake, Steelheart, Winger," he says. "All the guys with big hair, those are the guys I idolised as a teenager, so I think that naturally came out of me in this process."

The son of an English father and a Danish mother, Catton was born in Castle Hedingham, Essex before moving to Denmark aged 12. Alongside learning Danish (he's now fully bilingual), he developed his voice through church choirs and singing along to his parents' Michael Jackson cassette. "And when I was twelve my dad gave me a Who CD, which got me into rock."

It was *Guitar Hero* on PlayStation that introduced Catton to the heavier, shinier 80s stars that he truly fell for, and ultimately fed into his own music, initially with a high-school band. In his early twenties he fronted the Iron Maiden tribute act Some Kind Of Maiden. "I learned that is fucking hard," he says with a laugh. "Bruce Dickinson's vocals are right on the verge of what I can do. It's so high, so powerful. I learned to pace myself in a live situation. And I've got a lot of those Bruce movements in me as well, just because I've idolised those guys for years."

From there, a chance performance on stage at a Kip Winger concert – after an ultra-enthused Catton showed up several hours early, and was introduced by the venue owner – made its way onto YouTube, which was seen by Tainted Lady. Impressed, they asked him to be their singer. Club shows and festivals across Europe ensued, along with two albums.

Then, in 2020, Tainted Lady called it a day just as Catton graduated from his Masters degree, ready to throw himself into band work. Initially despondent, he was called up by Soren Andersen, who suggested making something together.

Now with a new live band and tour plans on the horizon, Catton juggles music with a day job in wind energy. "I enjoy engineering," he says, "but it doesn't give you the same rush as standing on stage in front of a couple of thousand people, playing music that you've written. That's what I want to be doing: going on tour, recording albums and having millions of fans who adore me." **PG**

Point Of No Return is out now via Mighty Music.

FOR FANS OF...

"The plan when I started this with Soren was to go back to that *Van Halen I* album," Catton says. But Whitesnake *1987* is probably the closest comparison. Coverdale pulls his chest voice up into such a high range, then you've got John Sykes on the guitar... It was the pinnacle of that eighties glam-rock/metal sound."

NIKOLA MAJKIC/PRESS

ZZ Top
La Grange

Celebrating a real-life Texan brothel, the visiting of which Billy Gibbons says was in its day "a rite of passage", after 50 years it's still one of the band's best-loved songs and a must-play at shows.

Words: **Dave Ling**

Usually it's a chorus, an individual performance or even a title that bestows immortality upon a particular song or track. In the case of ZZ Top's *La Grange*, it was Billy Gibbons's lascivious cry of "Have mercy!" followed by a deep a growl of "a how how how how", delivered over a gently picked riff saucy enough to flavour a thousand barbecues, that handed the Texan trio their first significant hit; a track that has now racked up more than 170 million YouTube plays.

Now a well-aged 50 years old, *La Grange* first appeared on ZZ Top's 1973 third album, *Tres Hombres*. The song celebrated a real-life brothel known as The Chicken Ranch, open from 1905 to 1973 and located on the outskirts of the Texan town after which the song was named. The Chicken Ranch went on to become the subject of a book called *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*, which was later made into a film (coincidentally starring our cover star Dolly Parton).

Regardless of how much the bordello has now been absorbed into popular culture, when talking to Billy Gibbons about the song you have to wonder whether or not he paid a visit to the establishment.

"Unabashedly, the answer is yes," he says with a chuckle. "For a young man in those days, it was a rite of passage. You had to go to the infamous Chicken Ranch of La Grange. You know, photos taken in its heyday still float around. It wasn't much to talk about from an architectural standpoint, but the place was well kept and well-managed. [The Madam] Miss Edna was always ready to crack the whip, which tended to keep everybody in line. I'm told that during the Great Depression [from 1929 to 1939] you could claim house favours by bringing along a real chicken, and that's where the place got its nickname.

"However," Gibbons adds in an obviously mock-serious tone, "I may be saying all of the above in order to bring legitimacy to the song."

Gibbons recalls that when he was growing up, the older guys he knew would talk about La Grange. "One of them even called it the eighth wonder of the world," he states. So the place was firmly on his radar when ZZ Top began preparing to record *Tres Hombres*.

Gibbons doesn't attempt to deny that *La Grange*'s opening riff owes a debt to *Boogie Chillen*, an iconic blues song recorded by John Lee Hooker in 1948.

"That's part of our fascination with carrying on the inimitable Texas shuffle," he explains. "You can also hear it in *Thunderbird* [from 1975's *Fandango!*], but the shuffle to *La Grange* became a tradition in its own right, and we have played it at every ZZ Top show since 1973. There are no plans to dismiss it, either. It brings a smile to those faces every night.

"That riff has remained a staple of that blues-rock tradition," he adds proudly. "Its roots can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of country music, hillbilly, even gospel music, but it's so identifiable. Each night when we begin that song, everybody has a little bit of a boogie."

"We have played it at every ZZ Top show since 1973. It brings a smile to those faces every night."

Gibbons also doesn't mind admitting that his cackle of "a how how how how" was borrowed from another John Lee Hooker song, 1961's *Boom Boom*, later popularised by The Animals. Nothing is original in rock'n'roll any more, and Gibbons is equally blasé about the fact that Kid Rock modelled his song *Son Of Detroit* on *La Grange*.

"Yes indeed," Gibbons affirms. "In fact, before he died [in 2021] the late, great James Harman, who contributed some bluesy harmonica to a couple of ZZ Top albums once played me a track from the late 1940s that preceded anything in that style that we'd ever heard. It was an exact blueprint for what you'd now call the famous boogie shuffle. Yeah, it goes back that far, and it's so infectious it will never go away, brother."

Gibbons remains proud that *La Grange* was covered by the country singer and songwriter Hank Williams Jr, who recorded it for his 1983 album *Strong Stuff*. "Man, he gave it a good blast," he enthuses.

Perhaps surprisingly, Gibbons admits that upon completion of the recording of *La Grange* at Robin Hood Studios in Tyler, Texas, none of the band's inner circle – trusty producer and manager Bill Ham, bassist Dusty Hill or drummer Frank Beard – had any real inkling of how important the track would become.

"We certainly enjoyed laying down the music track, and I had composed the lyrics after reading a book by an author from the UK called Dave Marsh," he says. "It was an overview of the career of Buddy Holly, and one of its chapters zeroed in on the famous song *Peggy Sue Got Married*. That book pointed out that the song ended with a question that did not rhyme. It was unusual for Buddy Holly, and that inspired me to write my own two closing lines in *La Grange*: *'I hear it's tight 'most every night, but I might be mistaken'*. So thank you for that, Dave Marsh, and thank you Buddy Holly."

When released as a single in 1973, *La Grange* reached just No.41 in the United States. In comparison to the band's MTV-popularised era during the following decade, when *Eliminator* singles *Gimme All Your Loving* and *Sharp Dressed Man* brought the trio a whole new audience, such a chart placing seems fairly modest, although the popularity of *La Grange* and its parent album helped to bring ZZ Top gold albums in the USA and Canada for the first time. Equally important, a half-century of performing the song live has taught Gibbons of its true value.

"That song set us on the right path," he concludes. "When asked for advice by our fans, we always say that a band should learn to play what it wants to hear. And that's what happened with *La Grange*. We did that fifty years ago, and we still enjoy playing and hearing it. It's not going away any time soon."

LA GRANGE AT LA GRANGE

ZZ Top generated scenes of hysteria when they performed the song *La Grange* in the Texan city of La Grange for the very first time, as part of the Fayette County Fair in September 2015.

"After so many years of presenting that song to audiences around the world, at last we had the opportunity to show up and play it in the city where it was born," Billy Gibbons recalls fondly. "That was quite a moment for us, and also for the people of La Grange. Yeah, it was a very big deal indeed."

GETTY x2

THE FACTS
RELEASE DATE
1973
HIGHEST CHART POSITION
UK n/a,
US No.41
PERSONNEL
Billy Gibbons
Guitar, lead vocals
Dusty Hill
Bass, backing vocals
Frank Beard
Drums
WRITTEN BY
Billy Gibbons,
Dusty Hill,
Frank Beard
PRODUCED BY
Bill Ham
LABEL
London

On their way to the top: Billy Gibbons, Dusty Hill and Frank Beard in 1973.

Q&A

Chris Shiflett

The Foo Fighters guitarist on his solo projects, his hair-metal history, and why surfing might hold the key to happiness.

Words: **Bill DeMain** Portrait: **Danny Clinch**

"To be honest, I'm not good at downtime," says Chris Shiflett. "I have to be playing, learning something new all the time." That explains why the long-time Foo Fighter wears so many professional hats, hosting a musicians' interview podcast (*Walking The Floor*) and a guitar-centric vodcast (*Shred With Shifty*), while pushing further into a burgeoning solo career with the release of his third album, *Lost At Sea*. Shiflett's easy-going demeanour and enthusiasm make him an engaging companion, whether he's singing about seizing the moment, or breaking down a Rush guitar solo with Alex Lifeson.

Which posters did you have on your wall as a kid?
When I was in elementary school I had pictures of Kiss all over my walls. Later a Randy Rhodes poster, a Sex Pistols poster. A lot of the time you were limited to what your local record store had [laughs]. As I got older I started collecting flyers; Armored Saint, L.A. Guns, Poison. It's funny, my wife used to be a stylist, and she would always put together inspiration boards, where she'd cover the walls with photos. It's kind of like that for teenage rock'n'rollers and posters. It's your inspiration board.

You got to perform with Kiss, right?
Yes, with Paul Stanley a few times. And I did this all-star school fund-raiser where Gene Simmons was a guest. On one hand, they're just nice guys and great players. But they were the ones on the posters in my room when I was young, and their records are the reason I started playing guitar.

Not dwelling on the past is a recurring theme on your new record. Isn't that a challenge as a songwriter?
Yeah, I think we're all nostalgic, and kind of overly sentimental. With songwriting, I'm constantly digging into earlier periods in my life. And I find myself pushing back against that because too much nostalgia is a dangerous thing. I try to write in the present. I have a pretty happy life, but I'm not comfortable with happy-go-lucky, zip-a-dee-doo-dah songs. There's real-life stuff that happens over time – friends dying, thoughts of mortality – and some of these songs really sort of speak to that.

Most of the album was recorded in Nashville. What's your impression of the city?
I'm a huge fan of country music and all its tentacles. If you're gonna make records that are steeped in that influence, there's no better place to work. The Foo Fighters spent about a week there recording a song for the *Sonic Highways* album, and I was intrigued. It's so humbling to be in the studio with all those top-notch players who bring so much to your songs. I never experienced that anywhere else.

What has it meant to you to play on the Grand Ole Opry?
It's been incredible. You don't go into that building without knowing the history of it. The stage, you're standing on the same piece of wood where Bill Monroe and Hank Williams stood.

How was it making the transition from your gig as an established sideman to frontman on your solo stuff?
Challenging [laughs]. Guitar playing is my comfort zone. But to be the singer and then also have to talk to the crowd, I had to work at that. What you realise is that people want to have a good time. They've hired a sitter, bought tickets, bought a few drinks, maybe bought a T-shirt, they've invested in the evening. So that's my job up on stage, to provide them with a good time. Once I figured that out, things got a lot better.

On your Instagram there's a promo pic of your early group Lost Kittens.
That was my band from ninth grade until 1998. We were trying to be like Hanoi Rocks or Faster Pussycat, but our songs were kind of all over the place, with three separate intros and five-minute guitar solos [laughs]. We moved to LA after high school and tried to get a record deal. It was the time of grunge; we saw the writing on the wall and broke up. But all of us went on to have music careers. And my buddy Robert, who was our drummer, is playing with me on the road now.

You're an avid surfer. Is there any overlap with your music?
We just did two weekend runs with my solo band in California, and all afternoon, before the shows, we surfed. Then we loaded in, did soundcheck and played the gig. You can't do that everywhere. But goddamn, when you have those kinds of days on tour, it puts everybody right! There's something about the ocean. It does something magic to you.

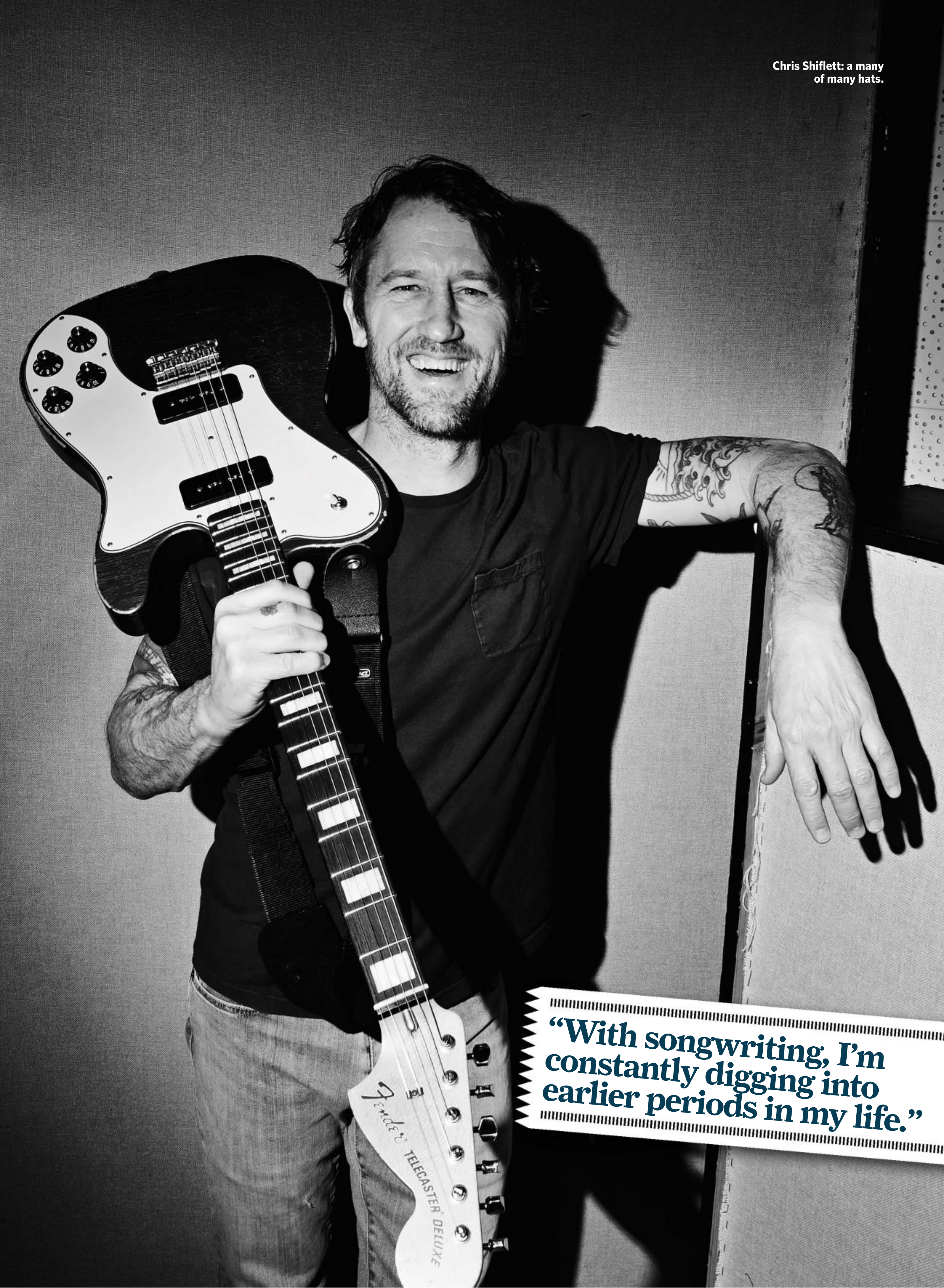
What do you like most about doing your podcasts?
Both shows were born out of my own curiosity. I found with *Walking The Floor*, it was a really good excuse to sit and talk to my heroes. And also to be constantly learning about new music. And on *Shred With Shifty*, I hope it'll be a tool for people to learn about guitar playing, amps and gear.

The Alex Lifeson episode was amazing.
He was so thoughtful, digging into why he played the *Limelight* guitar solo the way he did. I've never heard somebody express an approach like that. And it changed the way I think about my own solos.

What are you reading?
I just finished Peter Guralnick's *Last Train To Memphis*, the first volume of his Elvis biography. It gets deep into his origins. It's amazing.

Foo Fighter, solo artist, host of two podcasts. Is it challenging to wear so many hats?
The older I've gotten, I've been sort of gripped by this feeling of: "Damn, I wasted so much time when I was younger!" And you never get that back. I'm lucky that I have been able to do music full-time. And I want to keep doing it.

Lost At Sea is out now via Snakefarm.



Chris Shiflett: a many of many hats.

"With songwriting, I'm constantly digging into earlier periods in my life."

"I'VE BEEN ROCKIN' SINCE THE DAY I WAS BORN"

Well, no one saw this album coming. **Dolly Parton**, the undisputed Queen Of Country, talks about her new rock album and the *Who's Who* of rock royalty who clamoured to appear on it, and looks back over her extraordinary life.

Words: **Rob Hughes**

The voice is unmistakable. As is the playful peal of laughter that follows. "Hey there, is that Rob 'Halford' Hughes? Good mornin'!" It's 10am in Nashville, and the incontestable legend that is Dolly Parton is on the phone to *Classic Rock*.

She's evidently in good spirits. And so she should be. At 77, country music's resident superstar is on the verge of a somewhat unlikely crossover: a fully-booted, leather-suited, guitar-squealing rock album. And while there's a persuasive argument that Dolly Parton has, in essence, always been a rock star, now we have tangible proof.

Nor is the aforementioned Rob Halford reference just a random piece of alliteration. The Judas Priest frontman is one of a number of guests – an entire shedload, in fact – who appear on Parton's *Rockstar*. It's an album with an embarrassment of riches: Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, John Fogerty, Stevie Nicks, Steven Tyler, Debbie Harry, Peter Frampton, Joan Jett, Elton John, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Richie Sambora… And that only covers about half of it.

Like most things Parton has put her shoulder to over the years, *Rockstar* doesn't deal in short measures. It comprises a mammoth 30 tracks, of which roughly two thirds are covers.

These are songs swiped straight from rock's high table, from *Satisfaction* to *Stairway To Heaven*, *Let It Be* to *Purple Rain*, *Free Bird* to *We Are The Champions*.

"My husband Carl is a big rock fan," Parton explains. "I've heard so many of the great rock songs over the years, because that's the only thing he ever plays. We've been together for fifty-nine years now, so you can imagine how embedded that is. But of course, I had some personal favourites as well. I also had to pick songs that I thought I could *sing* well, that I thought I could do justice to. Or at least to try to be as impressive as I could, because I wanted the rock field to be proud of me. I wanted them to say: 'That's pretty good! I didn't know she had it in her!'"

Interviewing her is a slightly surreal experience. There are those fabulously identifiable Southern tones and inflections in her voice, of course. And a sense that, for her, this is an art she mastered many moons ago. But she weighs my questions with due thought and attention, often with a healthy degree of self-deprecation. She also chuckles a lot.

During the course of the next hour, *Classic Rock* discovers that her decision to record the album was shaped by both outside events and her own sense of guilt. There's plenty more too. Not least the fact that *Rockstar* has a number of precedents in ▷

MAIN: VIJAT MOHINDRA. COURTESY OF BUTTERFLY RECORDS. INSET: GETTY

Get your motor running… "Don't tell that nice Mr Halford that I borrowed it."

Got to move on Jagger… Dolly and Mick backstage at the Bottom Line in NYC, May 14, 1977.

her back catalogue. She talks about her early years, her single-minded ambition, her regrets over Elvis, being nervous about playing Glastonbury, future plans, her picky husband, and what she *really* thought of that White Stripes cover of her classic *Jolene*.

Ultimately, *Rockstar* represents the latest challenge in an extraordinary career.

"I've made my living doing country music and being a country girl, but making this album just felt natural," she says. "So I think it was meant to be and I'm glad I've done it. I'm proud of how it's turned out. And now I'm gonna have it as part of my legacy."

In February 2022, Parton found herself nominated for the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. The announcement – which also proposed the likes of MC5, New York Dolls, Judas Priest, Rage Against The Machine and Pat Benatar – came as something of a shock. In response, she sent a letter to the foundation, asking to be removed from the ballot. "Even though I am extremely flattered and grateful to be nominated for the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, I don't feel that I have earned that right," Parton wrote. "I really do not want votes to be split because of me, so I must respectfully bow out."

The Hall was having none of it, however. They explained that ballots had already been sent out to voters, justifying her nomination by adding that, from its inception, "rock'n'roll has had deep roots in rhythm & blues and country music. It is not defined by any one genre, rather a sound that moves youth culture. Dolly Parton's music impacted a generation of young fans and influenced countless artists that followed".

Parton duly decided to accept the offer if she was selected. In early May, she was officially announced as an inductee. This in turn brought up a promise that Parton had made in her original letter, namely that the whole affair had inspired her to put out a rock'n'roll album at some point in the future.

"I've made my living doing country music, but making this album just felt natural."

"I didn't feel worthy of the induction," she confesses now. "And I will never deny that. I know so many great artists – like Meat Loaf, for instance – that were never in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. So when they first told me, I thought: 'Damn, I can't let them put me in there, when so many of these great people have spent their whole lives in rock.' I didn't really understand all the reasons they do it, but they put me in anyway.

"So I accepted gracefully," Parton continues, "but I thought: 'Well, I'm gonna have to earn it,' because I'm like my daddy, I don't want nothing I ain't earned. Through the years I'd thought that I might one day do a rock album. And timing is everything. So that's really what motivated me to record *Rockstar*, because I had pretty much given up on the idea, because of my age. That's when I thought: 'No, I'm gonna do it.'"

At the HOF ceremony, held in LA last November, Parton performed in a black

MAIN: VIJAT MOHINDRA. COURTESY OF BUTTERFLY RECORDS; INSET: ALLAN TANNENBAUM/GETTY

studded latex jumpsuit, with a bejewelled black guitar slung around her waist. She proceeded to play *Rockin'*, a brand new song written for the occasion, complete with shredding solo. The lyrics drew from her love of rock'n'roll while growing up in rural Tennessee.

"I've been rockin' since the day I was born," she says, "listening to Elvis, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and all these people that I loved in my youth. And so I just kind of put together a little song to explain that whole experience of going into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. I was thinking back to those days, when I used to carry around my little transistor radio."

Parton wasted no time in inviting collaborators to appear on the proposed album. Some of them – Benatar, Halford, Pink, Sheryl Crow, Brandi Carlile and Duran Duran's Simon Le Bon – had also performed at the same Hall Of Fame bash. Others heeded the call directly: "I said something at the Hall Of Fame like: 'Hey, I'm thinking about doing a rock album. If there are any rock stars out there that want to help me…' or something to that effect. Then the next week, different people called and said: 'Well, if you're serious then I'd love to be on it.'"

There was no shortage of takers. Parton and longtime producer Kent Wells got to work in the studio.

"We started putting people on there and ended up with thirty songs," Parton recalls. Not everyone could make it, though. Mick Jagger's recording schedule with the Stones meant that he passed up the opportunity to duet on *Satisfaction*. And the dream Jimmy Page/Robert Plant reunion was never likely to happen for *Stairway To Heaven*.

Those two songs also highlight the potential issues behind *Rockstar*. By daring to take on such familiar touchstones, isn't she inviting trouble? It's something she admits to being all too aware of.

"My husband is a huge fan of Led Zeppelin and thinks *Stairway To Heaven* is one of the classic songs of all time," she says. "So he was kind of concerned about me doing it. He said: 'I don't know if you need to mess with that, because I think you'll get a lot of criticism. People don't want other people messing around with that song.' But I did it anyhow. And he made a joke about it at first: 'I think that was more like Stairwell To Hell than *Stairway To Heaven*!'"

Parton pressed on undeterred. Besides, she already has history with the song. She previously covered it on 2002's Grammy-nominated *Halos & Horns*, the final album of her experimental folk-grass trilogy.

"I've taken some rock things off and on over my career and countrified them," she says. "I did the first *Stairway To Heaven* in the bluegrass gospel field. But I decided, for this album, that I wanted people to know that I *could* sing it in its original form. And I wanted, more than anything, for Carl ▷

AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY

Dolly and Rob Halford singing *Jolene* at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction ceremony in LA in 2022.

ROB HALFORD

The Judas Priest frontman on singing Dolly's song *Jolene*, fanboy selfies, and how she tickled him into the studio.

Interview: **Henry Yates**

Geographically and culturally, it's a long way from the Midlands metal circuit to country music's epicentre in Nashville. But with Rob Halford and Dolly Parton's joint vocals on *Bygones* marking one of the high points of the *Rockstar* album, the Priest frontman says they share more common ground than you might think.

How did your collaboration with Dolly come about?
I think it's because we both like to sparkle, with what we wear [laughs]. It goes back to the amazing moment Priest was finally inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2022. Journalists kept asking me: "Who are you looking forward to meeting?" I told them: "I want a selfie with Dolly Parton."

We met for the first time at the Nokia Theatre in Los Angeles. She came out looking absolutely fantastic, and started tickling my beard. It was like the first time I met Madonna – I nearly had my cock out because she wanted to see all my tattoos. Now Dolly Parton is tickling my beard! So I thought: "Well, this is off to a good start…"

How did you end up joining her on stage that night at the Hall Of Fame?
She asked me: "Do you know *Jolene*?"' I love it. So we ended up singing *Jolene* side-by-side. It's mad. After the show, she was swarmed. Everybody wanted to get close to Dolly, she's like a Beatle. A few days later, she sent me a note: "Hey Rob, I just wanted to thank you for *Jolene*. You sure have a great voice." And I just had that feeling: "Something's going to happen here." I go back to my great-grandmother, who was a clairvoyant. Sure enough, not long later, we get communication from Dolly: "I'm putting this album together. Would you consider singing on it with me?" And my head is blowing up while I'm reading this. I was all in.

Were you a Dolly fan in your youth?
Yeah. My first recollections of Dolly go all the way back. I think everybody on the planet knew of this remarkable woman. I remember her being on British television and just being so engaging. When she performs, even if you're not a country fan, there's something about her personality that draws you in. Not only as a musician, but as a humanitarian, a staunch supporter of LGBTQ+ people, right from day one – even when you didn't talk about that. And visually she's as unique as Lemmy.

What did you think when you first heard *Bygones*?
When they sent me the demo, it was just immediate. It was in my world – it wasn't metal, but it was a tough song, and when you crank it up it's roaring. And it's a wonderful lyric. She's talking about overcoming the past and how love is stronger than yelling at each other – although I think people that are in love do yell at each other, and that's a healthy relationship. It's this great message that love always rises and wins. But the words of her songs have a tremendous reach beyond the initial subject matter. You could also put that song on the world stage – y'know, it could be about politics, government, war, anything.

What are your memories of recording your vocal?
She did all the work remotely. I went to my local studio here in Phoenix, told them I needed three hours. Dolly and her producer/co-writer Kent said: "We're not gonna tell you what to do, because you know who you are." But they kept calling me from Nashville! I would do a take, then Dolly would call me and say: "How's it going? Can I hear something?" "No, Dolly, hang on a minute, I'll get back to you." I get to the end of the session, and she's calling me again: "I want to hear something!" I say: "I'll send you the files in a minute." She says: "Let me hear something now!" So we had to put it on the speakers, and she's going: "Woo-hoo"' She's got this infectious laugh: "I love it, send me the files!" Eventually they sent me the final mix, and I just couldn't believe it, this Black Country yam yam belting it out with Dolly Parton."

Have you ever been to Dollywood?
Dolly asked me that and I told her: "No, but me and Thomas [partner] were talking about it last night." And she says: "You've got to come – I'll put you in the Dolly Suite!" I've got to do it, haven't I?

WARREN HAYNES

When asked if he would appear on *Rockstar*, his response was one word: "Absolutely!"

Interview: **: Hannah May Kilroy**

Known for his work with the Allman Brothers Band, the Grateful Dead and Gov't Mule, Warren Haynes is blues-rock royalty. No wonder, then, that the guitarist was one of the musicians asked to appear on Dolly Parton's rock album.

How did you become involved with Dolly's rock album?
I got a call from the producer, Kent Wells, who I've known for a few years, asking if I would be interested in playing and possibly singing on Dolly's record. I immediately responded with: "Absolutely!" Then he said the song was also gonna be with Steven Tyler. I was like, great! I'm a big fan of them both.

It was an exciting moment, getting asked to be a part of something that monumental and historic. I heard about Dolly turning down being part of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame because she wasn't a rock artist, and saying, well maybe I'll do a rock record. And then actually doing it! That whole process was fabulous.

What was it like working on the track?
I did my part separately, so I was in the studio by myself. I would have preferred to be in the same room as them, but it doesn't always work out.

Have you been a fan of Dolly's for a long time?
Always. Since I was a kid. I still remember when she had her TV show. She's one of those people that gets even better with time. Her voice is amazing, her persona as an artist is amazing, but a lot of people overlook the fact that she's such a tremendous songwriter. She's written so many great songs through the years, and I think that's one of the things that justifies her timelessness. I have an enormous amount of respect for her.

What is it about Dolly that appeals to the rock world?
I think it's honesty. She has this way of writing honest songs that draw people in and connect people: her songs relate to everyone. It's not like only a certain audience can relate to Dolly's songs. She reaches across the board. She's one of those rare artists, like Willie Nelson, that somehow has appeal to people in all different genres because her music is genuine.

What do you think you have in common with Dolly?
I'm from Asheville, North Carolina, and she's from right across the border in Tennessee, about forty-five minutes away. That region is so powerful in its own way. It's unique, and people from that region share a bond. And then there's her perseverance: she paved the way for people to do what they love and get away with it. And I'm one of those people.

to know that I could do that too. So I decided to be true to its form. And I have to add that Carl said: 'Y'know, that's pretty good.' That's really something coming from *him*!"

Ahead of the album's release comes a book. *Behind The Seams: My Life In Rhinestones* is suitably lavish, bursting with photographs, that traces the evolution of Parton's flamboyant fashion style over the decades. All the appropriate iconography is here – the gravity-defying wigs, sky-high heels, fitted pantsuits, leather dresses, cowgirl garb, butterfly gowns, a *Playboy* bunny suit, the famous Coat Of Many Colours – drawn from her private costume archive.

Its arrival underlines a maxim that Parton continues to abide by: in order to play the part, you have to look the part. That applies to *Rockstar* too. The album boasts several sleeve variations, all united by black leather imagery. There's Dolly astride a motorbike, a badass Dolly behind the leopard-print wheel of a car, Dolly striking a stack-heeled pose with a guitar, and Dolly in five-pointed eye patch.

Behind The Seams also comes with anecdotes and nuggets of acquired wisdom. One section mentions *Rockstar* and how Parton was determined to pull out all the stops while making it. "Rock is not just a sound," she writes, "it's an attitude. Doing things your way, being a rebel. That's why I think I've always had some rock'n'roll in my soul."

This idea clearly pervades the album. In practical terms, however, it meant negotiating a learning curve in the studio.

"I *do* think rock is an attitude," she offers. "In fact, I found that out for myself when I started singing those rock'n'roll songs. Standing there and remembering all the originals, I thought: 'Oh my god, I've got to make sure that I'm true to this.' I'm a stylist, I sing a certain way. But I also knew that I had to buckle down to it, because it's different from doing regular country songs, where you can just lay back and do it any way you please. There's more aggression in rock'n'roll, which I found energising. And you've got to treat it with respect, because it *is* its own thing."

Parton certainly brings a unique energy to *Rockstar*. One that finds ultimate expression in its closing showstopper: a near 11-minute version of *Free Bird*, backed by Lynyrd Skynyrd themselves. It transpires that the southern-rock classic was a late addition to the album's track-list, having initially been earmarked for another project.

"Kent Wells has been my guitar player, arranger/producer and bandleader for thirty-some years," Parton explains. "When I was getting ready to do *Rockstar*, he was busy producing an album for Lynyrd Skynyrd. They knew Kent worked with me, so they asked if I would sing on a new version of *Free Bird*. And it turned out really good. Later on I said to Kent: 'What about putting *Free Bird* on my rock album too, if we get permission from them to do it?' So that's what we did. Then Ronnie Van Zant's widow said that she'd let us use his voice on the track. She wouldn't allow Lynyrd Skynyrd to do it, but she said: 'I'll do it for Dolly!' So we got to use Ronnie on there. We had already recorded it, but his phrasing was so simple that they just dropped his vocal in.

"And then of course we had Gary [Rossington] and Artimus Pyle, all the people from the seventies band on there," she continues. "So the way that whole thing turned around was just unique. Some of them hadn't gotten together for a while, but one of their daughters said: 'You gotta do it!' So they actually mended some fences there, and I felt very blessed to be part of all that. Kent and I wanted to end the album with *Free Bird*. And of course Lynyrd Skynyrd have *their* album, too, though it's not out yet."

> **"Ronnie Van Zant's widow wouldn't allow Lynyrd Skynyrd to do *Free Bird*, but she said: 'I'll do it for Dolly!'"**

Sadly, Parton's epic rendition of *Free Bird* now serves as an epitaph for guitarist Rossington, who passed away this March.

"We were so heartbroken when that happened, because we'd done that track with Gary not long before," she says. "Right now, some of my crew are trying their best to see if we can actually get some footage of Gary and Ronnie Van Zant and try to incorporate that into a possible video. I'd love to make that work. Wouldn't that be something?"

Of the nine original songs on *Rockstar*, perhaps the closest to Dolly's heart is *I Dreamed About Elvis*. In addition to the

SHERVIN LAINEZ/PRESS

New York City, September 1976.

when I wrote the song, to see if he'd sing it with me. I just felt kind of inspired to write *I Dreamed About Elvis*. It's one of my favourite songs on the album. We didn't change it much from back when we recorded it."

Elvis Presley's influence runs deep in Parton's life. Contrary to popular myth, she cut her teeth on rock'n'roll, not country. Her first single, *Puppy Love*, was an up-tempo rocker, co-written with her uncle, Bill Owens. Released in 1959, Parton was just 13 when she recorded it for Goldband Records in Louisiana, a trip that involved a 30-hour bus ride to the studio.

Mention of *Puppy Love* draws a laugh of recognition from its co-creator: "I love that song! And my Uncle Bill loved it too. He's the one that helped me in my early days, taking me around to sing at different places. But he played guitar and was kind of a little rockabilly star of his own. He had a spit curl and black hair, so he looked like a rock'n'roller. And he recorded under the name 'Little Billy Earl with the Spit Curl' [much laughter]. Yeah, *Puppy Love* was rockabilly. We were influenced by Jerry Lee, *Blue Suede Shoes* and that whole era, especially Elvis. As a teenager, that's all I wanted to listen to."

The lyrics of *Rockstar*'s title track depict a teenage dream of becoming famous. Its protagonist is holed up in his or her bedroom, records blaring, a guitar plugged into an amp. *'I stand before my mirror, play and sing and dream/Some day I'll be standing in the lights, selling shows out every night'*, Dolly sings.

Is she drawing from direct experience?

"I've always done that," Parton affirms. "I've done that since I was a kid, standing in front of the mirror, singing and acting and doing whatever I imagined I'd feel when I became a star. I've practised my autograph all my life. I think most kids do that, if you've got a desire to be a star. You stand before the mirror, you try to comb your hair like Elvis did and try to make some moves of your own, or else imitate somebody you've seen. Everybody's done it."

On a deeper level, the song is also about staying true to your vision, to follow your ambition no matter how far-fetched it might seem. This is where Dolly Parton really comes into her own. The journey from what she calls "dirt poor" Little Pigeon River to Nashville glory and global megastardom often sounds like the stuff of country cliché, but Parton has actually lived it. Talent is one thing, drive, determination and fortitude are another.

"I was always very focused," she reasons. "I've never strayed from my dream, like a lot of people have. And I do believe that's one of the reasons I've

Performing *Turn The Lights Out When You Leave* and *Imagine* with Elton John at the Annual Country Music Association Awards in LA in 2004.

Jordanaires, Presley's old backing singers, she's also joined on it by singer and Elvis aficionado Ronnie McDowell. McDowell was the actual singing voice of Kurt Russell on the soundtrack of 1979's acclaimed biopic *Elvis*.

A sense of sorrow permeates *I Dreamed About Elvis*, rooted in Parton's refusal to allow The King to record her grandstanding 1974 ballad *I Will Always Love You*, later a hit for Whitney Houston. At the time, Parton was only too ready to make it happen, but the recording session was nixed after Colonel Tom Parker, Presley's manager, insisted that Elvis be given half the publishing rights in return. Parton was heartbroken at having to turn Presley down, later saying that she cried all night.

"There's a lot of regret that Elvis didn't record my song," she says. "I wrote *I Dreamed About Elvis* shortly after that episode with Colonel Tom. And I recorded the album version 21 years ago, using the group that actually travelled with Elvis. They were older guys, but still the Jordanaires. Ronnie McDowell used to travel with Elvis, and used to kind of fill in whenever his voice was bad. He sounds just like him, though he never tried to be an Elvis lookalike. So I looked up Ronnie

MAIN: DAVID GAHR/GETTY; INSET: MICHAEL LOCCISANO/GETTY

Earned their stripes: Dolly and P!nk (another of *Rockstar*'s guest) at the Rock A Roll Hall Of Fame, 2022.

made it. I never wanted to do anything else. I might've been a beautician had I not made it, because I still wanted the make-up and the hair and everything – I even played that role in [1989 film] *Steel Magnolias*. But making it in music was in my soul, my gut, my mind, my brain. If I had been a beautician or a waitress or whatever, I'd still have saved my money and I'd have been going into the studio doing demos and making records, even if it meant selling them from the back of my car. I'm one of those kind of artists, I would've *had* to do music somehow."

That single-mindedness took her to Nashville the day after she finished high school in 1964. Parton's first taste of success came as a songwriter for others, although she had to stick it out for another three years until her first solo country hit: Curly Putnam's *Dumb Blonde*, a misnomer if ever there was one. Within a decade she was country's all-conquering queen. Her reputation was forged alongside Porter Wagoner (both on TV and in the studio), but it was the early-70s run of self-written classics – *Joshua, Coat Of Many Colours, My Tennessee Mountain Home, I Will Always Love You* and, of course, the unstoppable *Jolene* – that turned her platinum.

From thereon in, nothing seemed beyond her: Hollywood movies, Broadway musicals, the Dollywood theme park, a multi-faceted entertainment company, TV and film production.

"You've got to be focused, you can't drift around too much," she explains. "A lot of people will get something going and then they'll fall in love or have a baby or do whatever. Anything can throw you off track and you can lose momentum. But I've never been pulled away. I was like a horse with blinders, I never looked back."

Unlike many of her country peers and forebears, superstardom doesn't appear to

MAIN: DAVID GAHR/GETTY; INSET: KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY

have damaged Parton. Her acute business instincts and iron will are clear to all – "Some people have called me an 'iron butterfly'," she writes in *Behind The Seams*. "I'm not offended by that, because I am a strong person" – but she's also tender-hearted. Crucially too, she's never lost sight of her roots, retaining a common touch and sense of humility that continue to endear her to millions.

So how has she managed it? How has she held on to her sanity in the face of intense public scrutiny for all these years?

"Who said I'm sane?" she chuckles. "Actually, I stay anchored because I don't try to follow other people around. I don't try to follow trends, I don't try to follow a fashion. I don't try to make my music be something that it's not. I just try to be true to my own gut feeling and what I think I can do. Like I've always said, I know what I know, and what I know I'm good at. But I'm also smart enough to know what I *don't* know, and I try not to meddle in that, unless I really think I can pull that off, like I did for this rock album. I always say that I live on creative and spiritual energy, and that's a good combination to keep you on the ground."

Dolly Parton refuses to let the grass grow under her feet. She's thinking about recording a gospel album, there's a Broadway musical in the works, plus an acting role in the film adaptation of *Run, Rose, Run*, based on her best-selling 2022 novel, co-written with author James Patterson. Parton has already released an accompanying album, while the movie version has been produced in tandem with Reese Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine company.

The basic premise of *Run, Rose, Run* feels very autobiographical: a young woman arrives in Nashville to pursue her dream of becoming a country star. Parton should have been filming already, but production has been caught up in the recent Hollywood strikes. "We were planning to start it in October, but then the strike happened," she explains. "So it looks like now it will be pushed into next year. I'm hoping some day soon we'll get a chance to do it, because I love working with Reese."

The Broadway musical, meanwhile, tells the story of Parton's whole life. "We're hoping we might have that ready for the spring of 2025," she says. "So I'm working on that in all my spare time. I've written all the music, and I've co-written the story too."

It's easy to assume that all these different ventures occupy their own particular space and time. But there's very little compartmentalisation in Parton's creative life. Rather, each project feeds into the others, crossing arcs and through-lines that cut deep into her body of work. The same applies to her recorded output.

"Through the years, I'd thought that I might one day do a rock album. And timing is everything."

Rockstar is a prime example. Contrary to outward appearances, the album doesn't exist in a vacuum. The poignant *My Blue Tears*, for example, dates back to 1971's *Coat Of Many Colours*. Parton has revisited the song several times since, recording it with Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt at one point, and later giving it a bluegrass makeover for 2001's sublime *Little Sparrow*. For *Rockstar*, she duets with Duran Duran's Simon Le Bon.

"I've always loved *My Blue Tears*," she says. "Carl was never the kind of person that would sit and listen to my music much. But when I first wrote it, I was singing that song in my music room and he stepped to the door and said: 'I really like that. That's a real good one.' The first person that ever recorded it was Goldie Hawn, when she did a country album [1972's *Goldie*]. So it's been done many times. I don't know what it is, but I just kept not giving up on that song. It's just an emotional country song. It reminds me of the old Elizabethan songs. I guess that's just embedded in my soul, that old-world flavour. For the rock album, I thought: 'Let's give it a bigger sound with the orchestra and everything, just to show what you *can* do with a simple little song.' It was for Carl more than anything."

Rockstar also sees Parton return to prior sources. Having recorded a cover of REO Speedwagon's *Time For Me To Fly* for 1989's *White Limozeen*, she's now covered another power ballad, *Keep On Loving You*. REO lead singer Kevin Cronin, composer of both tunes, is aboard too. "Kevin was one of those people that responded after I did the callout at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. I told him: 'I would absolutely love to have you on it.' I think we did a good job on ▷

AUSTIN LORD/PRESS

PETER FRAMPTON

Having asked to play guitar on Dolly's album, he also ended up singing his own classic on it.

Interview: **Bill DeMain**

"I'm so pushy," Peter Frampton says with a laugh, explaining how he came to be on not one, but two tracks on *Rockstar*.

How did you come to be on Dolly's record?
My manager got me in touch with Dolly's producer, Kent Wells. I said: "I'd love to play a guitar solo on the album." And Kent said: "Really, that's all you want to do?" I said: "Obviously I'd love to do a duet…" Then he called back and said: "Dolly's screaming that she wants to do *Baby I Love Your Way* with you." I said: "Let me think about it – yes!" [laughs] So my band tracked it, and I sang it all the way through, and I told Kent: "Have Dolly dip me wherever she wants to sing."

Did hearing her voice on it make you hear the song in a new way?
There was this extra Dolly energy on there – very emotional - and she's doing these wonderful ad libs, singing around me. I thought: "Holy shit, I better up my ante here!" So I went back in at the end and ad libbed with her. But the energy that she brought to the track, you can't help but get chills and smile when you hear it.

On the cover of *Let It Be*, you play the guitar solo.
With Paul, Ringo and Mick Fleetwood playing with me, no less! I told Kent I'm not going to do the George solo, because I've got to be me; if I had been in the room with The Beatles in 1969, this is what I would have played. I just closed my eyes and off I went. It's very in-the-moment. I got a big thumbs-up from Dolly.

And Paul?
Well I know he likes my playing. I'd love to know what he thought of the solo. But the bottom line is, I love it.

When we spoke last year, you were finishing what you thought would be your final dates. I'm happy to see you on tour again.
Thanks. It's been a welcome surprise that my IBM [inclusion body myositis, a muscle disease] is progressing very slowly. I was very nervous about that last tour in Europe. But after a couple of shows it was kind of evident that everything was good.

Have you adapted your playing?
Yes, it's not quite the same. I have to sit down to play now, and the band sits down with me. It makes the audience lean in. It's like they're watching us in the living room. I literally felt that the whole audience were a big pair of arms that embraced me. It's very emotional every night, I almost lose it. And sometimes I do when I say goodbye, because you couldn't wish for better audiences. It would be one thing if I came up there, we did an hour and I could barely get through it. But we do two and a half hours, we're rocking, and the band is killing it!

“Well look who’s here!” Richie Sambora joins Dolly on stage at the Glastonbury Festival in 2014.

RICHIE SAMBORA

The former Bon Jovi guitarist on he and Dolly blowing up Glastonbury, playing on *Rockstar*, and why “Dolly is Elvis, man”.

Interview: **Henry Yates**

Trust Dolly Parton to come out all guns blazing. When the country star needed a name rock guitarist to bolster *Rockstar*’s opening title track and statement of intent, she turned to the former Bon Jovi man who backed her at Glastonbury a decade earlier. “It was an honour to be asked,” he tells us.

How far back does your friendship with Dolly go?
Well, Dolly covered [Bon Jovi’s] *Lay Your Hands On Me* in 2014. That summer, I was on a tour of my own for a solo record called *Aftermath Of The Lowdown*. And on my day off I got a call. Dolly was doing Glastonbury, and she needed some rock’n’roll juice. So I go: “Of course.” But I said: “You’re gonna have to chopper me out there.” Because, y’know, Glastonbury is in the middle of nowhere and there’s five million people in one road. That was the first time we’d ever met. We walked out on stage in front of 225,000 people, and we blew the place up. I flew back to London and played with Stevie Wonder that evening – on my day off!

Was Dolly part of the culture when you were growing up in New Jersey?
Of course. Country music started for me with Johnny Cash and Dolly Parton. I was a blues hound, y’know, a rock guy that loved everything, starting out with the whole English invasion that happened to us here in America in the sixties, when I had teeth [laughs]. And it continued on. How could you not be a fan of the great songwriting in country? Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, everybody else. But Dolly and Johnny Cash were the entry points for a young guy in America.

The track you did and the album are titled *Rockstar*. Do you consider Dolly to be one?
Of course. What I heard is that she gets inducted to the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, and [initially] she turned it down because she didn’t make a rock album. So then, when she wanted to make a rock album, what else would it be called? It’s kind of impossible to describe her. She’s a phenomenon. She knows what she’s doing, and she has done for a long time. I don’t want to insult the woman by saying her age. I actually do not know her age – and she is timeless. It’s like she’s been here for ever and she will continue to do so. There’s only one. Let’s face it: Dolly is Elvis, man.

What did you think of *Rockstar,* and what are your memories of recording the track?
I loved her self-proclamation in the lyric. Dolly and Kent [Wells], her producer, they kinda left it on me to do what I do, to make that kind of record come to life. I recorded my parts at the Power Station [in Manhattan], where I once worked as a session guy. It was April and it was snowing. I have an apartment with my girlfriend here in Hell’s Kitchen, and I walked there like I would normally do when I was nineteen years old. I brought in Nile Rodgers’s engineer, Russell Graham. It was basically just the two of us. And I had a gas, we tore it up. There’s some talk-box guitar on that track, y’know, if you want a bit of my moniker on there. I sang background vocals too – I used my Beach Boys harmony training for all that stuff. And it went that quick [claps hands]. That means it was supposed to be, as far as I know about making records.

There can be a certain scepticism in rock’n’roll circles. What would you say to someone who isn’t sure whether to investigate a rock album by Dolly Parton, best known as a country artist?
Music is coming from a long time ago and we’re all just pushing it on. So hop on. I learnt how to play guitar by listening to records, reading the backs of records: let’s find out where Zeppelin got their shit from, let’s find out where The Beatles came from. They came from Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters and *Good Golly Miss Molly* and Little Richard. And where did they come from? That’s the way people should look at it. Dolly may have been the beginning of that movement, whatever you want to call it. If you’re not a fan of Dolly, you don’t understand music very much.

Did Dolly give you her verdict on your contribution on *Rockstar*?
It’s on the record, isn’t it? [laughs].

Keep On Loving You. I loved recording *Time For Me To Fly* all those years ago too. That was another one of my husband’s favourites that I did in a bluegrass fashion. He didn’t like that one either!”

Elsewhere, Richie Sambora’s presence on the title track connects directly to Bon Jovi’s huge-selling 80s rocker *Lay Your Hands On Me*. Parton covered the song as a spirited country-gospel number for her album *Blue Smoke* in 2014, the same year that co-writer Sambora appeared alongside her to perform at Glastonbury.

Nine years on, Parton’s memories of that occasion are no less vivid. She played the Pyramid Stage late on Sunday afternoon, sandwiched between sets by Ed Sheeran and The 1975. In a white, rhinestone-studded suit, Parton was phenomenal, drawing a record-breaking crowd of 180,000 and serving up the hits. Mass singalongs ensued, from *Jolene* and *Here You Come Again* to *Islands In The Stream* and *9 To 5*. Even the security staff had choreographed their own moves.

“I felt a little nervous about doing Glastonbury,” she admits, “because I knew it was mostly a rock audience. They were having their fun, just wanting to get into the music, dancing and feeling it. And I was thinking: ‘So much of my music is slow and storytelling. I’m not sure about this.’ I thought that when I got out there they might be whooping and hollering over the stories I was telling. But when I walked out I just got this tremendous acceptance. And when I would tell my stories they were as quiet as they could be and they seemed to really be into it. It turned out to be one of the best things I’ve ever done. And then with Richie coming out and playing with me on *Lay Your Hands On Me*, y’know, that killed it. We had a fine time.”

With three million-plus watching on TV, Parton’s spot was the most viewed of the entire festival.

Before she took to the stage at Glastonbury, Parton received a special presentation marking career album sales of more than 100 million. In the States she’s the only artist to have made the country charts in each of the past seven decades; no other female performer has scored more chart-topping singles in *Billboard*’s country listings; and she has more Top 10 country albums than anyone in history.

But while she will forever be associated with country music, it’s little surprise that Parton has also been embraced by the rock crowd and beyond. Hers is crossover music. Marianne Faithfull, Sisters Of Mercy, Sinéad O’Connor, Percy Sledge, Martha Wainwright, Nancy Sinatra & Lee Hazlewood, Angel Olsen and members of The Mekons have all recorded her songs.

Then there’s The White Stripes. In 2000, Jack and Meg White covered *Jolene* as the B-side to *Hello Operator*. This was no token throwaway. The song became a regular

SAMIR HUSSEIN/GETTY

"You want cool?"

live favourite of theirs, to the point where a version from 2004's *Under Blackpool Lights* DVD was later issued as a single. Another rendition was on their 2010 live album.

Parton seems genuinely thrilled when I bring up the subject.

"I think it's great! I love The White Stripes, and I was so honoured that they did their version of it. And the fact that they played it on stage for a while. I'm always tickled to death when anybody goes into my songs. They don't always have to sound like mine, though The White Stripes didn't change it all that much. I mean, *Jolene* is *Jolene*. You can never change a woman like that!"

At this stage, a follow-up to *Rockstar* appears unlikely. The sheer weight of 30 songs, she says, means that she doesn't feel the need to do another rock album any time soon. "That's not to say I'll never sing another rock song or never write one," Parton adds. "Actually, I think I *will* write more stuff like that, because I've got that in my veins now. I think it really added a new dimension to my writing."

"I felt a little nervous about doing Glastonbury, because I knew it was mostly a rock audience."

The whole experience only serves to shore up the idea that Dolly Parton, like fellow Rock And Roll Hall Of Famers Johnny Cash or Hank Williams, transcends country music completely. She belongs in a category of one, a bona fide, honest-to-goodness living icon.

"I think I do [transcend country], and I think I have done that, even through the years with the movies and all," she muses before it's time to sign off. "Hank did that because of his writing and his honesty, I guess. Those songs are so simple, but they're so damn good. They're so deep. The same with Johnny Cash. I always think of him as the John Wayne of country music. He just was a *personality*, a fixture in our business. People loved him, he's a legend. I don't know that I'm a legend, but if I'm not now then maybe I will be!" Another eruption of laughter. "Hopefully I'll be around a while yet."

On the (country) road to stardom: Dolly in 1974.

Rockstar is released on November 17 via Big Machine.

MAIN: VIJAT MOHINDRA, COURTESY OF BUTTERFLY RECORDS; INSET: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

THIS IS WHO I AM

Ahead of the publication of his revealing autobiography, **Geddy Lee** talks about some of the events and people who have helped to shape his life as a person and as a musician.

Words: **Paul Elliott** Portrait: **Mick Hutson**

When Geddy Lee was writing his autobiography, he thought of giving it the title *My Life In Comedy*. His publisher, however, felt that was a little too self-deprecating for the memoir of a man famed for his virtuoso skills as multi-tasking bassist, singer and keyboard player with legendary rock group Rush. So Lee proposed an alternative title, again with tongue in cheek, and this one stuck: *My Effin' Life*. "I do have a tendency to drop 'F' bombs during any conversation," he explains, "so effin' is a word I use a lot."

Lee is talking to *Classic Rock* on a beautiful end-of-summer day in London, where he is on holiday with his wife Nancy. Dressed all in black, his long hair pulled back, and peering from behind tinted glasses, he's looking good for a man who recently celebrated his seventieth birthday. He's also in relaxed mood as he begins with some small talk about baseball and his grandchildren. But within the first few minutes of an hour-long conversation, his mood suddenly shifts as he reveals the reason for putting his extraordinary life story on record. "Originally I had no interest in writing a memoir," he says. "I just felt like my life is unfinished. But a couple of things happened that profoundly changed my point of view."

"Originally I had no interest in writing a memoir. I felt like my life is unfinished."

In January 2020, Neil Peart, Rush's drummer and lyricist, died at the age of 67. The following year, Lee's mother Mary, a Holocaust survivor, passed away aged 95.

"I had the sadness of watching my mother slowly being affected by the ravages of dementia," Lee says. "It was heartbreaking to see that she could no longer remember stories she had told me in the past. And she didn't know who I was at times, which freaked me out. So it got me thinking about memory and how fragile our memory banks actually are. The other thing was that Neil had finally succumbed after a three-and-a-half-year battle with brain cancer, glioblastoma, and during that time I witnessed kind of the same things I'd seen happen to my mother. Neil had a remarkable memory right up until the end, don't get me wrong. Sometimes his powers of recall were staggeringly accurate even when he was suffering the most. But, you know, I started thinking: 'What if I forget? Holy crap, what if all the experiences of my life suddenly disappear into the dust?'"

There are plenty of good memories in *My Effin' Life*, mostly relating to all the great music Lee made with Rush, and all the high times shared over 40 years with Neil Peart and guitarist Alex Lifeson. But in the course of this interview, when Lee recalls the hard times and the losses, there are moments when he takes lengthy pauses as he struggles to find the right words and to keep his emotions in check.

There is a remarkable degree of raw honesty and self-awareness in *My Effin' Life*. As Lee puts it: "What is the point of a memoir, other than to give you some sort of explanation into the human that's writing it?"

In the early part of the book you trace the history of your parents and the horrors they experienced as Polish Jews in Nazi concentration camps. Was that a way of honouring your mother, who first told you those stories when you were a child?

That's true. I am trying to honour her. In 1995, when I took my mother back to Germany with my brother and my sister, I recorded what she said for a family history. Future generations need to know what happened, and I wanted to tell the right story. I wanted to check the facts and find out exactly what happened as best as I could, and that was a pretty deep dive. So I began to cross-reference what I had on tape from her with other stories from family members. I got down to what I think is the most accurate telling of what they lived through. And I felt it essential for my own story not only to honour my mother, but to explain.

Left: "The earliest known photo of me playing guitar: summer of '66 on a visit to Detroit, wowing my cousins with *For Your Love* (and my brand-new Beatle boots). Cool enough for ya?"

Below: "What a blast! Broke but living in hotels, jamming day and night. Even though Neil wasn't adept, he loved to have a guitar in his hands and plunk away."

GEDDY LEE ARCHIVE x5

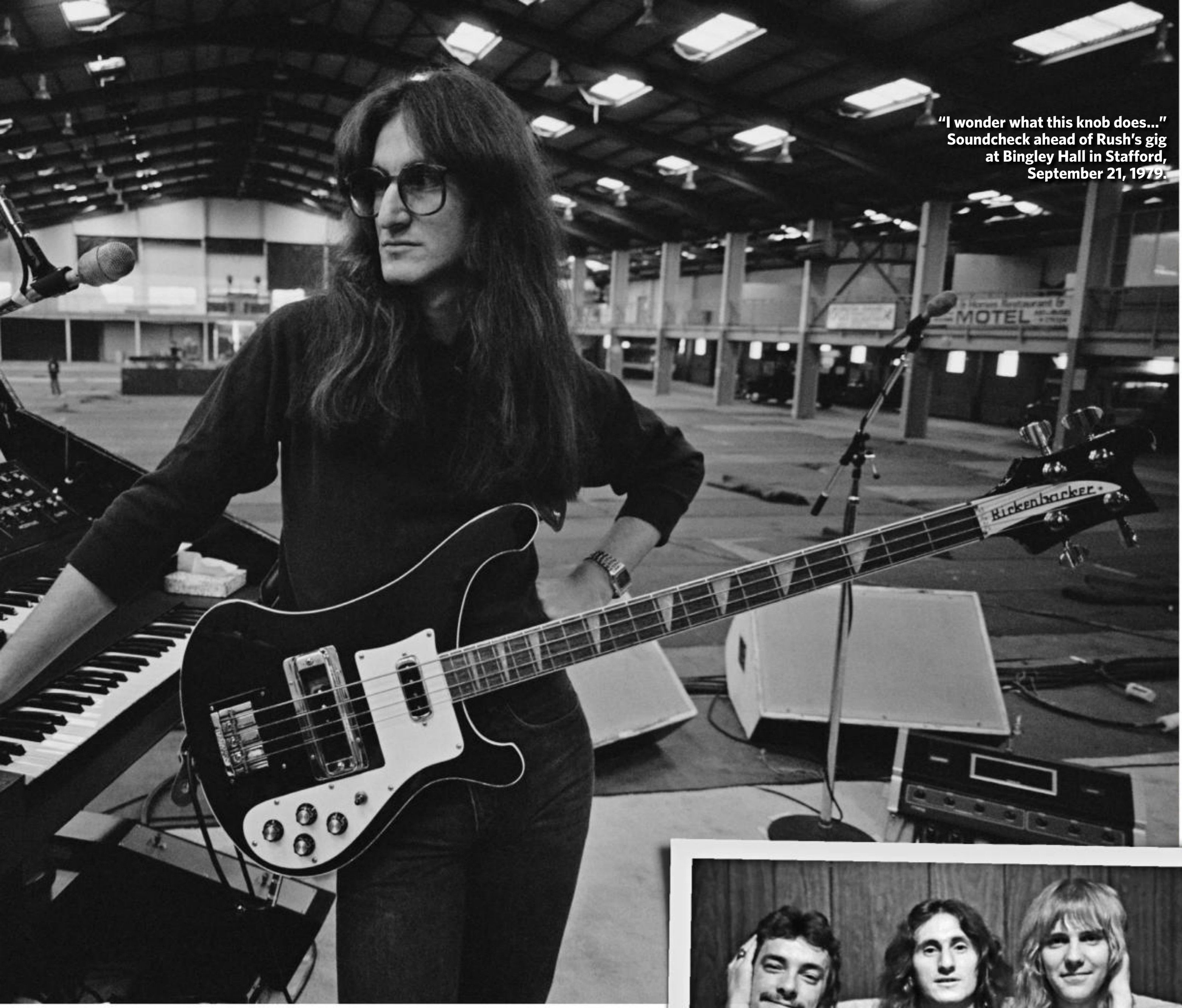
You also write with a degree of humour about what it is to be Jewish. At times it reads a little like Woody Allen.
Absolutely! Humour was a big part of how these survivors dealt with what they'd witnessed. I like to think that the culture I was born into wasn't just based on religion. It was a culture about attitude and humour and brown food and overcooked meats. There's a lot to make fun of, and a lot of joy I get from being a part of that culture. I'm an atheist, I don't believe in God, but I do love being a Jew for all those reasons.

You're able to laugh at yourself. For example when you're remembering *The Fountain Of Lamneth*, one of the more pretentious early Rush tracks.
Well, back then, in the heat of the moment, *The Fountain Of Lamneth* seemed like a good idea. This was our first twenty-minute conceptual track, and we were deadly serious about it. But you also have to bear in mind that we were pretty fucking high when we were making it.

On the subject of drugs, there's a rather sad story from the early eighties where you hung out with a female fan who had some cocaine, but abruptly dispensed with her company as soon as the last line had been snorted.
It was really a low point in my life, I have to be honest. I remember it so clearly – going back to my hotel room and looking at myself in the mirror, thinking: "What the fuck is wrong with you?" You can try blaming it on the drug, but it's you taking the drug. I realised what I had allowed myself to turn into, and it shocked the hell out of me. That moment was the end for me with cocaine. I guess you could call it a cautionary tale.

You also admit that the rock'n'roll lifestyle – all the long months on tour and in recording studios – put a strain on your relationship with your wife, Nancy. Did you consult her about making this public in the book?
I felt that I had to write the full story – this is who I am, and how I lived. If there's no room for that in a memoir, then really you're just kind of telling tales. Nancy still hasn't read the book. She's a very reserved person, so when she finally reads it in full I'll be very curious to see how she reacts to me.

You write very movingly about the tragic events of the late nineties, when Neil Peart suffered the losses of his daughter Selena in a road accident and his wife Jacqueline to cancer. But in later years, after Neil had found happiness again with his second wife, Carrie, and their daughter Olivia, he insisted on shorter tours with Rush to allow more time with his family. It was a choice you understood, but still resented?
Well, one part of your head is saying that Neil deserves his time with his new family. Look what he's been through. He's had the shit kicked out of his life, and he still walks around with demons from that terrible time. You never heal from that. You learn to cope, but you never fully recover. So who the fuck am I to deny him that opportunity? You got that on the one hand. On the other hand you're going: "Fuck, man, this show is so great!



"I wonder what this knob does…" Soundcheck ahead of Rush's gig at Bingley Hall in Stafford, September 21, 1979.

"I started thinking: 'What if I forget? What if all the experiences of my life suddenly disappear into the dust?'"

I want to take it to more people. Just ten more gigs, mate…" But you take the good with the bad. And honestly, I didn't think he'd ever come back after he lost Jackie and Selena, but he did. So everything since then really was bonus time, from 2001 all the way to 2015.

The R40 tour turned out to be Rush's last, ending at the LA Forum on August 1, 2015 after just thirty-five dates. What was your state of mind at that time?
I was frustrated. I had some anger. And then, a year later, Neil sent an email where he announced he was sick. And in a heartbeat, all that resentment and frustration was gone.

Because Neil had always been so protective of his private life, were you concerned that you might reveal too much when you wrote about his final years?
Yes, of course. And also, Carrie and Olivia are going to read it. So I didn't want to betray any confidence, but at the same time I think it was appropriate to describe the difficulty of that three-and-a-half-year period. It was difficult for me, and I was just his friend, I wasn't part of his family. And it was a nightmare for them, what they had to live with on a daily basis. Alex and I would visit him every few months, and all that time we were keeping the secret, which was very fucking hard, because you're basically lying to your friends all the time. With some of the people I lied to, they knew the truth but they never pushed back. They just accepted what I was doing was out of loyalty. In the end I also felt that there was a way to write about his last years that doesn't embarrass him, but instead shows the nobility he maintained throughout those horrible years of fighting with that disease. He remained himself. Even though it was sometimes difficult for him to get all the words out, he still maintained his sense of humour and a very sharp attitude about music and life. Right to the very end he was an exceptional thinker, a very moral, upstanding guy. In the last conversation we ever had together, I was still in awe of this man. So I thought the world should know that.

You mention the sense of humour that Neil had, and how it was a key part of his long relationship with you and Alex. When I interviewed Neil in 2012, I was surprised by how funny he could be – when he was talking about his love of birdwatching, or some of his early lyrics in songs like *By-Tor And The Snow Dog*.
That was the thing that most people were surprised about when they met him, because they had this image of him as a serious guy, very intense, when in reality he was kind of a goof. We had so much fun together, and most of our fun ▷

MAIN: FIN COSTELLO/GETTY; RIGHT: TERRENCE BERT

Rush at the Civic Center in Springfield, Massachusetts, during their *All The World's A Stage* tour, December 9, 1976.

"Neil was an exceptional thinker. In the last conversation we ever had together, I was still in awe of this man."

was totally nonsensical. I know that it's hard for fans to see him as this nonsensical dude, but he sure was. I think it helps that you have a character like Alex Lifeson with you at all times, because he's the funniest human being on earth. Neil adored Alex because of the way he was able to loosen him up, even in those last couple of years. The conversations during our visits were tough at times, because you didn't want to keep talking about the disease and what he was going through. So I always reverted to making fun of Al, and it always made Neil laugh. Always, always, always. So even when Alex wasn't being intentionally funny, he brought joy to Neil in those last years.

The late Taylor Hawkins was a huge fan of Neil's, and when the Foo Fighters staged two tribute concerts for Taylor in 2022 at Wembley Stadium and the LA Forum, you and Alex were part of the all-star line-up, performing Rush songs with Dave Grohl, Chad Smith, Danny Carey and Omar Hakim taking turns on drums. In your book you say that this brought a sense of closure for you and Alex, where you could move on from grief to remembrance. Which is a beautiful way of putting it.

Those two shows were really unusual for very different reasons. The show in London was perhaps the most joyous celebration of loss that I could ever imagine. I've never seen so many musicians in one place, and the atmosphere backstage was profoundly positive. For five or six days before the show we were all holed up at a hotel with every other musician and all their friends and families. Every night you'd be in the bar with these folks, and there was no backbiting, no cynicism, no one-upmanship. You could feel the spirit of Taylor and the love coming from the Foo Fighters family. That was really touching. And Dave Grohl is one of the most remarkable human beings I've ever had the pleasure to meet and work with. So here we were, Alex and I, having not played together in years, feeling pretty nervous about who's going to play the drum parts. But it all came together, and in some ways it was maybe the greatest gig of my life. The whole atmosphere was like nothing I'd ever experienced.

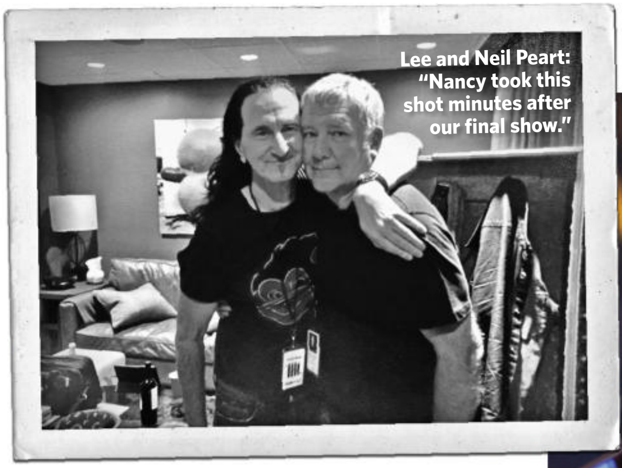
But when we got to LA for the second show, things were a little different because of what that venue symbolises to me. Being back at the Forum, where my band had played for the last time, it felt like I was returning to the scene of the crime. So I tried to be as joyous as I was in London, but I couldn't find that same head-space. I was much more withdrawn backstage at that show, thinking about things. But I walked away from it feeling that at least we had done justice to Taylor, and, in a small way, justice to Neil.

Have you ever considered doing something similar in memory of Neil? A celebration of Rush, with perhaps Dave Grohl and other drummers that Neil admired?

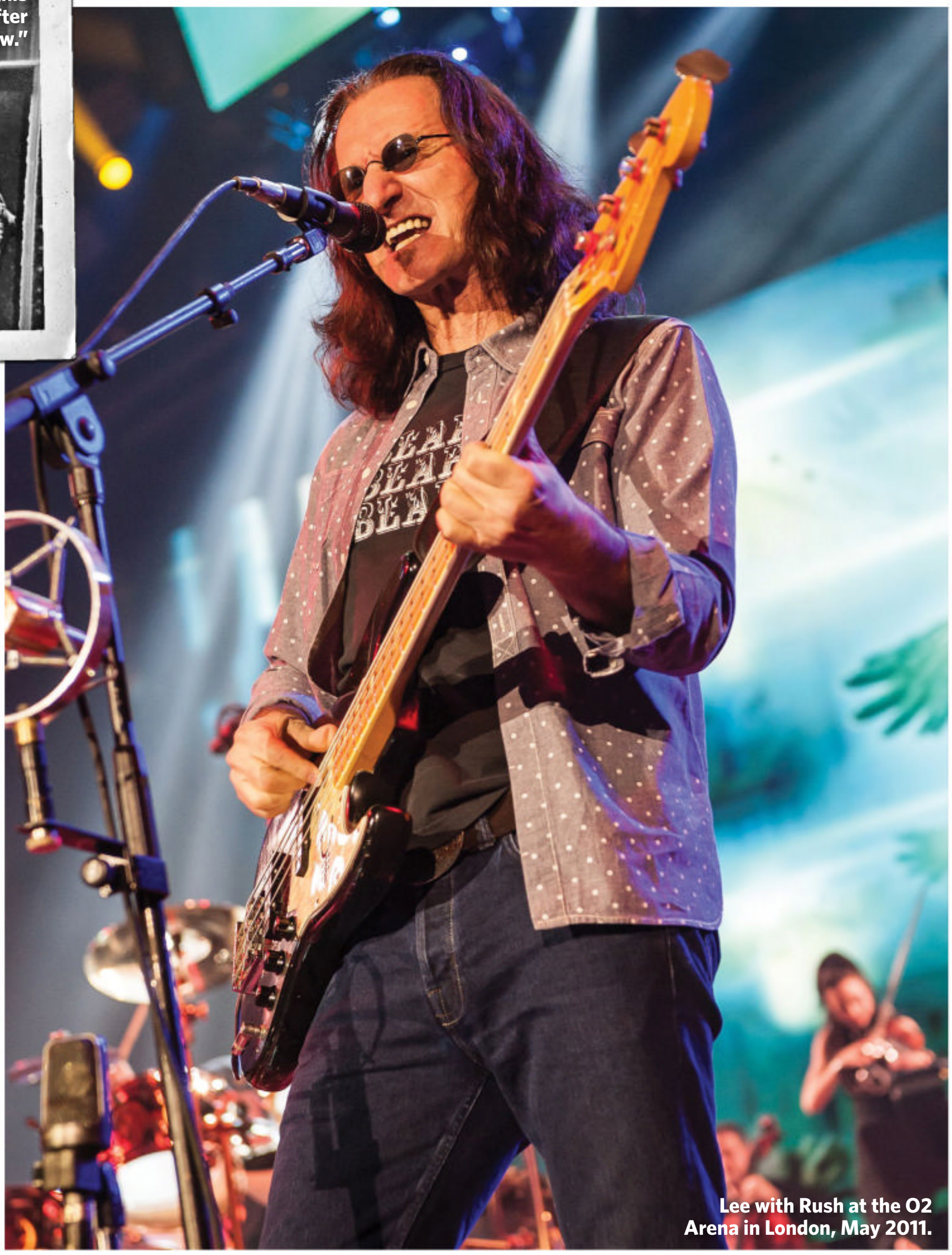
We did. We were planning to do a memorial in Toronto, but then the pandemic hit, and by the

An out-take from the photo session for 1977's *A Farewell To Kings* at Monmouth Castle in Wales.

MAIN: FIN COSTELLO/GETTY; CENTRE/RIGHT: GEDDY LEE; BOTTOM: ROGER STOWELL



Lee and Neil Peart: "Nancy took this shot minutes after our final show."



Lee with Rush at the O2 Arena in London, May 2011.

time we'd come out of it a couple of years had passed. We feel like we were robbed of the moment. But you never know. We still talk about it. If we can get our shit together we might be able to pull something off.

Are you working on new music?
Well, I have a few ideas. Recently I found a couple of tracks that were written for my solo album [*My Favourite Headache*, released in 2000]. My co-writer for that record, Ben Mink, discovered these demos, and when I listened to them I was not embarrassed at all, which was a good sign. I thought maybe if I could clean up these demos a little bit we could add them to the audio book of *My Effin' Life*, and they would make for interesting listening as, you know, historic relics. And while working on these tracks it was really interesting the way they made me feel. It made me want to write again. It made me want to get back on the horse, so to speak. So I think that bodes well for the future.

Why didn't those two songs make the cut for *My Favourite Headache*?
Mainly because we had enough for the record. We were recording in Seattle with Matt Cameron [Soundgarden/Pearl Jam drummer], and we kept pulling out song after song for him to play. Finally I said to Ben: "Let's have mercy on poor Matt!" So those two songs stayed in the can. But there were other reasons at the time.

Meaning what?
One of them was written right after Neil's daughter Selena had passed away. The song is called *Gone*. It's a song about loss. And even though it's not exactly about Selena, it reverberates because it's about all those losses, and what you feel when someone in your life is suddenly gone and you're left with these feelings that you can't make sense of. So at that time, out of respect to Neil, I thought I can't put this on the record, it's too raw.

And the other song?
It's called *I Am You Are*, and again it's a very personal song about what I was going through relationship-wise, and how tough it can be when you're in the middle of an argument with your loved one or your band, whatever it is. It's a beautiful song. I think both of these songs are good pieces of writing. So I'm happy that they will finally see the light of day.

You've stated unequivocally that with Neil's passing there is no more Rush. But have you thought about making music again with Alex?
Alex and I have been in very different head-spaces for a few years, and our timing has not been good, mainly because I keep writing these effin' books [he also wrote *Geddy Lee's Big Beautiful Book Of Bass*], which takes me away from having time to spend doing my proper gig. But we talk about it. I see Alex all the time. We're still as close as two pals can be. So it's not beyond the realm of possibility that we would do some writing together.

"Neil adored Alex because of the way he was able to loosen him up, even in those last couple of years."

Has Alex read *My Effin' Life*?
Yes. He loved it. And he wrote me the most beautiful letter afterwards. He couldn't have been more effusive. But, you know, he's a Serbian guy, he's very emotional. So… let's just leave it at that.

It's been emotional for you too, of course, to write this book and to talk about it now. So if we can end on a positive note, is there one memory you have from all the years in Rush that makes you think how fortunate you have been?
There are so many of those moments. When I want to laugh, I think about how we used to live, when we travelled together on the bus in the late seventies and early eighties. After a gig it was kind of the best time. You'd leave the gig and pile onto the bus, and you had all that post-gig energy still going on. You really needed to calm down. So you'd have a few drinks, and maybe you'd take a Valium, and you'd watch some stupid movie together, and it was just jokes until you passed out or went to your little bunk bed on a shelf to sleep. These were moments when it was just the three of us and the few guys from our crew that we travelled with. You can't replicate those moments. We could do another gig, Alex and I, with other people, but all those times we shared when it was the three of us, you can't get that back ●

My Effin' Life is out on November 14, published by HarperCollins. Geddy Lee's UK book tour runs from December 10-18.

MAIN: KEVIN NIXON; INSET: NANCY YOUNG

IS THIS THE REAL LIFE?

There have been wild nights, bad decisions, imposter syndrome and much more, but **The Struts** never stopped wanting to be the biggest and the best.

Words: **Polly Glass**

One night in Miami, through a blur of tequila and bad decisions, Luke Spiller realised he had gone too far.

Arguably it was always going to happen. An aspiring dancer who studied Michael Jackson videos, taught himself piano and wore women's clothes as a teenager, Spiller had long burned harder and faster than his peers. After relocating to Los Angeles, his maximalist personality was teamed with heavyweight glitz, bolstered pre-covid by a split with his long-term girlfriend, model Laura Cartier Millon. It was like striking a match over petrol.

As pandemic restrictions eased, things escalated in good ways and bad ones. There were days of fervoured creativity. People-watching and songwriting. Wild parties. Multiple girls. Nights in Hollywood that turned into days, waking up in "some stranger's weird-ass apartment" and wondering what just happened.

It all peaked that pivotal Miami night, fuelled by tequila, pink cocaine and a rampant lack of inhibition. At one point, he tells us, everyone thought he was dead. The song *Bad Decisions*, a searing slice of honesty on The Struts' career-topping fourth album *Pretty Vicious*, was born in his hotel room.

"I can't go into too much detail," he says. "I hurt a couple of people who didn't deserve to be hurt. I was kind of seeing someone at the time, I really let them down, and it all came back and blew up in my face. But I managed to smooth everything over. It was sort of…" [he thinks about this] "I think there was a couple of moments last year where I just didn't really give a fuck. I didn't care what anyone was thinking."

In one sense, that's Spiller all over. It's there in his stage presence – part Noddy Holder, part Liberace, part mega-church minister. It's there in the songs that drew us to The Struts in the first place – proudly bold and bright while their contemporaries played it cool. The fearlessness that's brought them this far.

It's also there in the nuanced picture of success that *Pretty Vicious* paints: jubilant highs, vulnerable lows and a lot in between; reflections of four thirty-somethings who've seen and done so much since the precocious, "character-driven" days of *Kiss This* and *Dirty Sexy Money*.

Recorded mostly live, and co-produced by Julian Raymond (Fleetwood Mac, Cheap Trick), *Pretty Vicious* is the band's truest team effort to date, and their mercurial singer/chief lyricist's most honest work. There's joy and heartache here. More-ish grooves and guitars. Queen-esque harmonies. Snapshots of life in a time of money, sex and opportunity.

"This is on-the-money, real-life experiences," bassist Jed Elliott says. "Hearing that vulnerability from Luke, I was super proud of him, because we've not always seen that come out through the music."

"I was inspired by Ray Davies," Spiller says. "It was a safe way of living out a fantasy. And then in the last couple of years life began to imitate art, for better or worse."

He glances out of the tour bus window, looking a little younger in black joggings and a baggy jumper, his make-up-free eyes wide but calm.

"I kind of fell into it."

"Our music's made for bigger rooms than we're playing. It always was."

Jed Elliott

The car park at Nottingham's Rock City is filling up. Crew members and gear move quickly as taxis deliver band members for the opening night of The Struts' UK tour. It's a family affair. Guitarist Adam Slack's relatives and friends are all coming tonight. Spiller's parents are riding on the tour bus for the next two nights. Elliott recently got married in Napa Valley (to Californian actress Virginia Gardner) and the band played at the wedding.

"Bless my mother-in-law, she said: 'Do we tip the band?'" says a grinning Elliott, looking trendy but comfy in a Japanese-edition Struts jumper, like a Netflix star just off the plane. "I was like: 'I'm in the band, I think we're good! The boys, you put some instruments on stage, some wine, we'll be dying to play anyway.'"

The past few years have been full of similarly 'California' times for the British foursome. There have been celebrity collaborations. Victoria's Secret shows and after-parties. One New Year's Eve with Tommy Lee, another at Nashville's 'Music City Midnight' in 2019, the latter climaxing with Elliott and drummer Gethin Davies kissing on stage, sandwiched between ▷

BEN COPE/PRESS

Strutting their stuff at the Forum in London (l-r) Luke Spiller, Jed Elliott, Gethin Davies, Adam Slack.

Stevie Nicks and Nicole Kidman. Hallmarks of a strange life in Tinseltown.

"That was your last New Year's kiss apart from your wife!" exclaims Davies, all long limbs and tattoos, mop of hair under a baseball cap. A trace of Welshness lingers in his voice, under the West Coast-honed surfer vibes and bright eyes.

"Oh, respect!" Elliott beams, realising. "We were both single at the time, not that we were looking for anything romantic with one another. But we looked around, we were pretty drunk, couldn't find anyone else; we weren't gonna snog Nicole Kidman or Stevie Nicks…"

It's a far cry from their early days in nearby Derby, where they shared a house, wrote songs and abused their bodies, *Withnail & I*-style – in between playing gigs "about once a month", mostly to Slack's parents.

Tonight they'll play to a much bigger audience, including an enthusiastic contingent from those early shows in the Derby and Nottingham areas, back when The Struts' future – and the popularity of rock'n'roll in general – was far from certain.

"In LA everybody's someone, or trying to be someone."

Luke Spiller

Nottingham is full of memories for Adam Slack. Raised in Derby, the guitarist grew up going to punk shows at Rock City. The Struts played some of their first gigs at the now-defunct Spanky Van Dykes bar. When he visits home, he and his old friends go out here for chicken wings, beers and open-mic nights.

Periodically, the same group reunite as Adam Slack & The Bangers – Slack's pre-Struts band – to play Green Day covers at The Hairy Dog pub in Derby. It's a world away from the spin classes and sunshine of Calabasas, Los Angeles, where Slack lives with singer-songwriter girlfriend Kelsy Karter.

"I love it for one night, then I'm full," he says of his frontman role with The Bangers. "I'm an okay singer. My vocal range is pretty shit. If I had Luke's voice I'd probably enjoy it more."

A shaggy-haired bundle of affable, nervous energy in black flares, ear piercings and an AC/DC T-shirt, Slack feels like the heart of The Struts, the quietly serious, Oasis-loving Richards to Spiller's Jagger. Seven years ago he was diagnosed with OCD, which helped make sense of his struggles with anxiety. He's no longer on medication, but does see a therapist.

"So when it does raise its head, I'm better equipped to deal with it. My imposter syndrome is just through the roof. I catastrophise everything. I get a call from management and I'm like: 'Oh shit, the end of the world!'" he says, laughing. "But yeah, it's just [a case of] dealing with it."

As a kid Slack taught himself to play guitar through Green Day hits. Aged 13 he was writing songs and playing gigs. At a McFly signing at HMV in Nottingham, he slipped them a copy of his band's CD.

"I remember getting there, I think four o'clock in the morning, with a bunch of girls, basically… We went, the four of us, and gave them a CD. Then Harry [Judd, McFly drummer] got in touch with me on MySpace and passed it on to their management." Through that, Slack was introduced to Spiller. They've now been a team for 14 years.

Slack and Spiller are very different people, but they share an unwavering, totally sincere focus and ambition – a desire to be the biggest, the best. "I want this album to be massive," Slack says. "I think the dream is to be playing stadiums."

"Our music's made for bigger rooms than we're playing," Elliott says. "It always was. It's my hope with this record that it connects in a bigger way."

When it came to writing *Pretty Vicious* (named after its most 'alternative' track), there was debate as to which direction it would take. A lot of material was scrapped, much of it in the alt.pop vein that survives on the *Wicked Game*-esque title track, as well as the smoky, Stones-y groove of *Better Love*. Realising that most of the songs could be better – and that the world was finally warming to the old-school rock'n'roll they'd been advocating all along – it was decided that they needed to write a proper rock record, and do it right.

"We had so many people in our ears on the old label," Slack says: "'You can't have the guitars too loud in the mix, it won't be on radio' and shit like that. Now there's guitars everywhere. Pop stars are holding guitars. It's cool to have guitars again."

"A lot of times before, because we'd write quickly between touring, I'd kind of lay down the first thing that came out," Elliott says. "I didn't really feel I got to express myself on previous records. But I got to way more so on this one, where it did feel very celebratory, in this really cool vibey Nashville studio."

On stage, the bassist provides much of the vocal harmonies that give The Struts their grin-inducing edge. He's been harmonsing most of his life,

starting with his parents' Irish folk and pop records (his mother is Irish) followed by his high-school band in Devizes, with whom he began touring when he was 14.

For Davies, who grew up above a pub in Llanddewi Brefi, listening to classic rock on the jukebox, the live nature of *Pretty Vicious* is a natural fit. You can hear it in the warm, cavernous beats of *Hands On Me*, the zingy crash 'n' punch of *Rockstar*. "Going in every day, the camaraderie," he says, "we'd go to the bar every night after and go: 'Oh, that sounds the best.' There was that kind of excitement. I think that shows on the tracks."

It all feels like a reminder – after pop-heavy singles like *Body Talks* – of where their hearts really lie.

"We've always been a rock band, and always will be," Slack says. "On the first two albums we pushed the production because we didn't want to be… [he chooses his words carefully] I like Greta Van Fleet, but they are very… If they were in the seventies you'd believe it. Whereas we were always thinking: 'How can we make the music we love, from that era, sound like a modern-day version of that, and push the envelope on it?'"

Their latest photos reveal a visually evolved group, too. Less kids who raided their aunt's fancy-dress boxes, more 21st-century dandies. Fashion designer Ray Brown (dresser to Rival Sons and Judas Priest) did their latest threads. For Spiller, now sporting a dirty-blond thatch of Rod Stewart hair, it's been a welcome change.

"I just got so fed up of being called Freddie Mercury all the time," he sighs. "Not that that made me change it, but I was running with the black hair look for such a long while.

"My imposter syndrome is through the roof. I catastrophise everything."

Adam Slack

"*Everyone*'s wearing skirts now," he continues. "Boys wearing skirts, the lines are super-blurred, which I think is great. But now everyone's doing it it's become the mainstream, even Måneskin getting to the heights they have. And I'm like, fuck that, I'm ready to be a bit more distinguished, a bit more elegant and, dare I say, even masculine. I don't like to follow what everyone's doing."

Backstage at Rock City, Spiller considers the pearls around his neck. "I'm a bit worried they'll break…" he mumbles, looking briefly timid for a man in black leather trousers and eye glitter.

Twenty minutes later he's on stage, waving his hands like the Messiah and bellowing: "Let me see you shake your *arses*!" to *Dirty Sexy Money* and *Too Good At Raising Hell* – the sort of ultra-glitz The Struts do so well. Catchy reflections of Spiller's hedonistic escapades, which fuelled much of *Pretty Vicious*.

"There'd be a session," Slack recalls, "he'd arrive first, to be fair, and go: 'What did you do last night?' I'd be like: 'Stayed in and watched *Love Island* with Kelsy. So what did *you* do?' And it was like [he laughs, raising thick eyebrows] *okay*." ▷

LIVE PHOTOS: BRAD MERRETT

Dreaming big and aiming high: (l-r) Gethin Davies, Luke Spiller, Jed Elliott, Adam Slack.

Since the cocaine-fuelled night in Miami, Spiller has led a calmer life. He lives in Burbank, just across from the celebrity homes and sushi restaurants of Studio City. He writes songs with ex-Jellyfish guitarist Jason Faulkner at his house in Silverlake, and plays bowls in Beverly Hills with retired NASA engineers and film producers. The sort of old-Hollywood glamour he loves.

"There's one bloke who drives the most beautiful Rolls-Royce, I think he's got about four or five of them, and a private jet… Yeah, they're quite an interesting bunch."

During the pandemic, Spiller found himself similarly engaged at the bowls club in Dawlish, Devon. Hunkered down in a house that his parents had been renting out, he wrote songs, smoked weed and drank coffee at the piano, and went to the local pub for Happy Hour. A solo album began to evolve (in addition to the musical he's had in the works), built around "piano, vocal and orchestral accompaniment", all about love, sex and heartbreak. It was, Spiller says, the greatest summer of his life.

"In LA everybody's someone, or trying to be someone. And when you go somewhere like Dawlish, people are just being people in the nicest way possible. You have real conversations about real fucking things, rather than your Uber driver trying to give you a script when you're on the way to the studio."

Now back in America, he rarely goes to gigs. You're more likely to find him at a jazz or blues night. He says there's a connection between these nights and the religious environment he was raised in. Until the age of 16 he attended church every Sunday, watching his preacher/musician father in action.

"There's no ego in it," he reasons. "They're not singing to impress. They're tapping into something that no one can see, touch, but yet feel… There's something really beautiful in that. Something so selfless, when people really mean it, and my dad means it. I guess in some ways that's rubbed off onto me. The only way I knew how to perform was coming from a place of passion."

> **"Pop stars are holding guitars. It's cool to have guitars again."**
> **Adam Slack**

On stage at Rock City, that fervour emanates from old favourites like *Primadonna Like Me*, married with the extravagant spirit of a man who was never going to follow his father into the church. Passion and perspiration double as the night progresses. The audience sings every word of *Put Your Money On Me* as if it were *Hey Jude* or *Wonderwall*.

Afterwards we find Spiller backstage with a towel around his shoulders, his songwriter girlfriend, Kate, and his father at his sides. Davies gives us a sweaty hug and chats to Slack's partner Kelsy, all leathers and long black hair. The gig went brilliantly, and they know it.

"It was just joy joy joy!" Spiller Snr exclaims, his preaching days coming out through hand gestures. "That separates them from other rock bands, this intense joy."

Two nights later it's a similar story at London's Forum, all heartfelt singalongs, big hitters and Spiller's jazz hands, bounding across the stage in a long Union Jack-coloured jacket.

At the aftershow the frontman works the room in winklepickers and a yellow checked suit, like a Bay City Roller at a cocktail party.

"I wrote down a list of things I want to achieve in the near future," he mused earlier. "I want my Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud, I want to find real love, I want to make more money than I ever have, and I want to create five top-ten singles. And I want to carry on pursuing my solo stuff, and finish the fucking musical. So those are my goals."

The mood is similarly buoyant. Elliott shows us a vaguely Buddhist tattoo done by a "coked-up Frenchman" one tour. Drinks flow, and the four of them chat to industry people, family, friends and fans, without the distance or weirdness that usually comes with a certain level of success. They feel like people you'd gladly go to the pub with.

Spiller's dad looks on, remembering his own jazz-handed 'show me your hands' moves as a minister – moves that his boy has clearly absorbed. "He's a lovely son, I miss him a lot, but he belongs to the world," he says.

It's strange, now, to think of the churchgoing teen who studied Michael Jackon videos and shut himself away for hours, learning the piano and dreaming. As to the secret of his impact, his father's explanation is unhesitating: "People want to be led," he says simply.

Pretty Vicious is out now via Big Machine/ John Varvatos.

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TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

With songs about God, love and hope, **Duff McKagan**'s new album *Lighthouse* might be a long way from the music he's best known for, but he says it still reflects the punk rocker in him.

Words: **Dave Everley** Photo: **Charles Peterson**

Even on Zoom, Duff McKagan exudes rock-star cool, right down to the old-school *Instinct*-era Iggy Pop T-shirt he's wearing. "Iggy's a deity to me – there's Prince, Lemmy and him," says Duff. Iggy is one of the guests on the Guns N' Roses bassist's rootsy new solo album, *Lighthouse*, which feels like a slightly punkier companion piece to 2019's lovely *Tenderness*.

Questions about GN'R's upcoming plans are off limits today, but there's still plenty to talk about, from a great lost Slash guitar solo, to Bob Dylan's unexpected papal blessing.

What was the spark for *Lighthouse*?
Guns were going to go out on tour, but we played one show and – boom – covid hit. I'd already recorded two or three songs, but I went back home and went into my studio five days a week and just kept writing and recording. I ended up with enough for four records. This *Lighthouse* record is the first one.

What does the *Lighthouse* of the title track represent to you? Is it a place? A person? A state of mind?
In the simplest context, it's a love song. It's a summation of mine and [wife] Susan's relationship. I'm the person going across the ocean, getting washed up on the shore, and she's the lighthouse. But also, in a broader way, during covid we were all fucking confused and freaked out: "What's next?" I was always looking for something beautiful to grasp on to.

In the song *I Saw God On 10th St*, you imagine God as an angry homeless guy swearing and spitting in the street. What was the inspiration for that?
God On 10th St is about how we're all fucking up. If there is a God, he might be that fucking dude on the corner who's spitting and cursing and we think he's got some mental illness. Nah, that's God, and he's fucking pissed at the whole thing, and he's fucking pissed at you.

Jerry Cantrell of Alice In Chains appears on the track *I Just Don't Know*. Where did you first meet him?
Alice In Chains played The Palladium in Hollywood in 1990 and I got up and played. We hung out for the next three or four days up at my house – me and the whole band. That began a really great friendship that has carried on through all kinds of ups and downs, but we both came out of it pretty good. We're talking about doing an album together at some point.

Slash plays on *Hope*. Do you tell him what you want him to play, or do you just step aside and let him get on with being Slash?
No, we just have this great musical relationship. I never say: "Hey, play this", it's just there. That part dates back to 1996. During covid, I got the masters back from a record I made at my house in the Hollywood Hills that never came out, called *Beautiful Disease*. Slash was going through some stuff at that time, and I had him over to my house. One day he said: "Can I play on this song?" There was nobody at my house, so I just recorded it on two-inch tape. He listened to the finished song on this album and went: "Man, I love this… but I do not remember playing it."

Iggy Pop makes a spoken-word cameo on the record. The image of him is this wild man who is always getting his dick out. What's he really like?
Well, he's still the wild guy getting his dick out [laughs]. It's hard for me to have a regular relationship with him, cos he's been Iggy Pop to me since I discovered The Stooges when I was twelve or thirteen years old. I've been lucky enough to play on two of his records [1990's *Brick By Brick* and 2023's *Every Loser*]. He's such a hard worker; he's kind of like James Brown in how he runs a band. The last time, it was me, Chad Smith, Jamie from The Kills. And he called Chad "drummer". Like: "Drummer – can you hit that on the up beat." And this is Chad Smith!

Did he call you 'bassist'?
No, but I was waiting for it to happen. He did ask one of the guys in the band if he smoked: "Maybe you should have a cigarette on that song." I was like: "I really hope I don't get asked to smoke a cigarette." But he's very appreciative of musicians, and he's a lovely, lovely man.

In an interview last year, Bob Dylan said the song *Chip Away* on your previous album, *Tenderness*, had "a profound meaning" to him. What did you think when you heard that?
I started getting texts from friends. Axl went: "Hey dude, have you seen this?" I was a little stunned because… [shakes head] *Bob Dylan*?! I don't know him, so for me to be recognised by him as a songwriter was great. I'm still a little blown away.

You should have asked him to appear on the new album.
I sent him a deluxe version of *Tenderness*, and I sent a handwritten card saying: "Thank you very much for your kind words, here's my record. And if you ever want to write a song together…"

When you were really young, you played in the punk bands The Fartz and Vains. Would that kid connect with what you're doing now?
I was thirteen or fourteen years old when I was playing in those bands, but even then it was about the fucking truth. It didn't matter what chords you put behind it or how fast you played, it was always about the truth. I think I would have recognised that's what I'm trying to do today. These songs are still railing against shit, and also showing that I'm not afraid to express my love, which to me is punk rock.

Can you see a guitar band coming out now and making the same impact that Guns N' Roses made? Has rock'n'roll still got life in it?
Man, I hope so. I see these young people out to Guns show, and I'm like: "Man, it's cool you're coming to see us, but there should be a band that's twenty-one or twenty-two that you're fucking losing your shit to." I don't know if it'll be the same, but I fucking hope so.

"These songs are railing against shit, and showing that I'm not afraid to express my love."

Lighthouse is out now via BFD/Orchard/Sony.

ALAMY

THE MAN WHO SAW THE FUTURE

In 1970, **David Bowie** the one-hit wonder was on the verge of becoming David Bowie the decade-defining artist. *The Man Who Sold The World* was the album that helped him recalibrate his sound and vision.

Words: **Bill DeMain**

By March 1970, Major Tom was becoming something of an albatross to his 23-year old earthly counterpart David Bowie. The success of his single *Space Oddity*, which reached No.5 in the UK and sold nearly 150,000 copies, had pushed up fees for Bowie's live shows and made him flush for the first time in his six-year career. But the song's connection to the Apollo Moon landing had coloured it with a novelty status that he was finding it difficult to get past. His latest single, *The Prettiest Star*, written for his new bride Angie and featuring Marc Bolan on lead guitar, sold only 800 copies and didn't even make the charts.

Bowie had other troubles on his mind too. He was grieving for his father, who had died a few months earlier at the age of 56. His management contract with Ken Pitt had soured to the point where he wanted out. There was also the delicate matter of his schizophrenic half-brother Terry, who'd been living with his parents. After Bowie's dad passed away, his mother, unable to cope with Terry, committed him to Cane Hill Asylum. Bowie visited him regularly, but felt increasingly guilty over not being able to do more to help.

Looking back in a 1971 *Phonograph* interview, Bowie summed up his state of mind at that time: "I really felt so depressed, so aimless, and this torrential feeling of: 'What's it all for anyway?' A lot of it went through that period."

> **"I really felt so depressed, so aimless, and this torrential feeling of: 'What's it all for anyway?'"**
>
> **David Bowie**

So it made sense to stay cocooned with Angie in their flat at Haddon Hall, a shambling old Victorian house in Beckenham. Sharing the rent was Bowie's producer pal Tony Visconti, and his girlfriend. The record that became *The Man Who Sold The World* began with their late-night conversations about the idea of moving away from singles toward albums.

"We wanted to make an art-rock album," Visconti said in Dylan Jones's book *David Bowie: A Life*. "On the *Space Oddity* album we had no idea what we were doing. It was all over the map. So we tried something different, something harder. We just threw caution to the wind. It had to be seen by our peers as a work of art rather than just a pop album, as David and I were into the idea of a concept album. The single went out of favour for a while because the likes of Led Zeppelin and Yes were making albums that were outselling singles for the first time We wanted to be seen as a great album group."

With Visconti on bass, Bowie's new band began to come together that spring with the arrival of two musicians from Hull – guitarist Mick Ronson and drummer Woody Woodmansey. Ronson had met Visconti on a session for Michael Chapman's album *Fully Qualified Survivor*, a now-forgotten record that, thanks to Ronson's touch, has pre-echoes of *Hunky Dory*. Ronson attended a Bowie show and afterwards returned with him to Haddon Hall for a late night jam. ▷

In *Beside Bowie*, the 2017 documentary about Ronson, Bowie recalled: "I started playing some of my songs on my twelve-string and he plugged in his Gibson. Even though he was playing at a very low volume, the energy and grit cut through the room and he immediately established himself as a very well-defined player."

"Mick was like Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix all rolled up in one person," Visconti told *Performing Songwriter*. "He had it all, and his technique was phenomenal, as were his sensibilities. He knew the right notes to play, the right way to play a song. Give him a song for ten minutes and he was there."

"I think it was more Tony's ideas on the album than David's."

Later Bowie producer Ken Scott

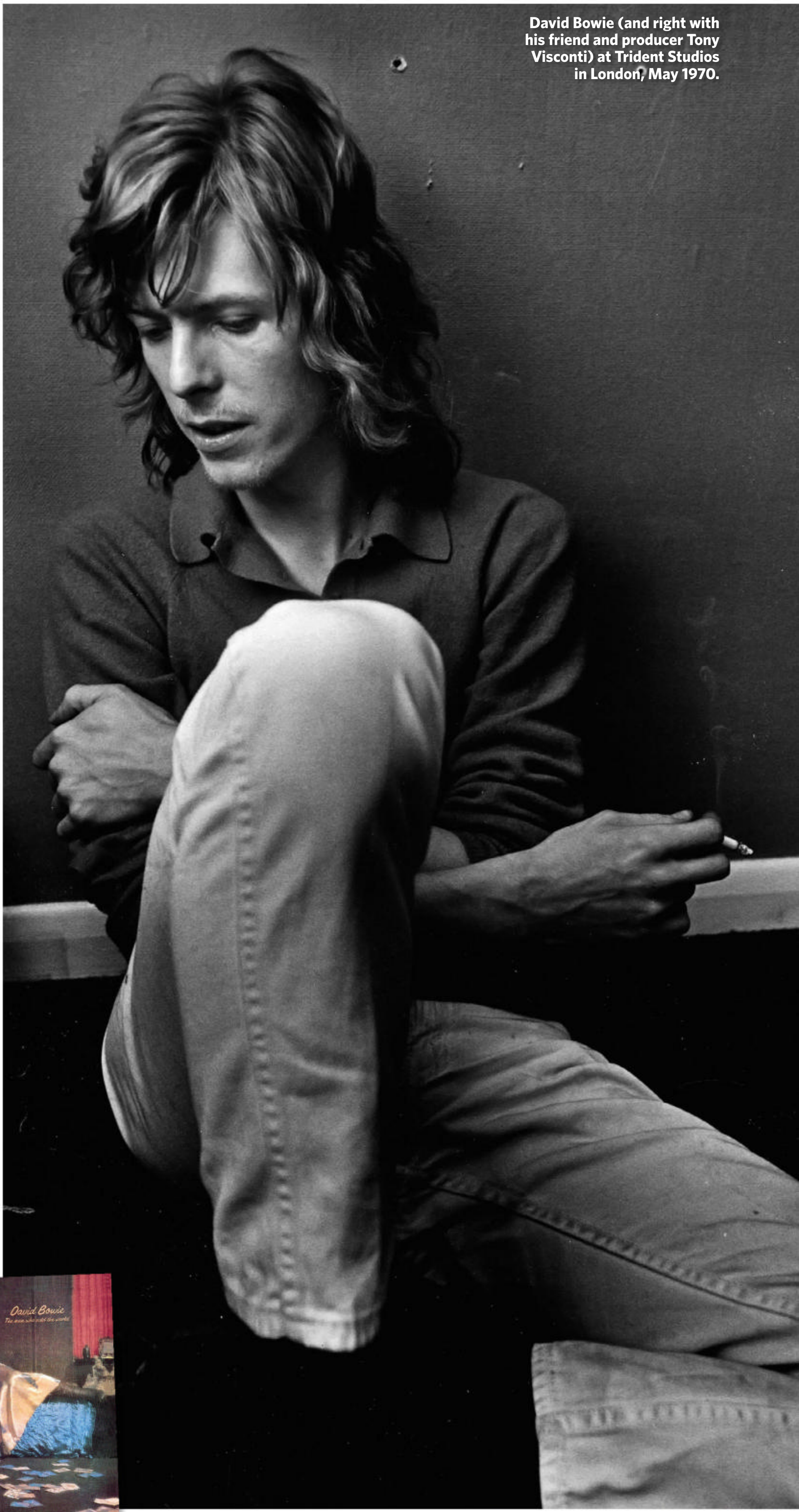
That idea was tested two days later, when Ronson, with no rehearsal, did his first gig with Bowie, on the *BBC In Concert* series. "It was incredibly exciting," Visconti said in *David Bowie: The Golden Years*. "Because we knew that Mick was going to work out – he had something we needed."

With his enthusiastic demeanor and deep musical vocabulary, Ronson was a perfect foil for Bowie. After he moved into Haddon Hall, the two became inseparable, and would sit for hours across from each other, working out chord progressions and designing the riffs that would inspire the songs on *The Man Who Sold The World*.

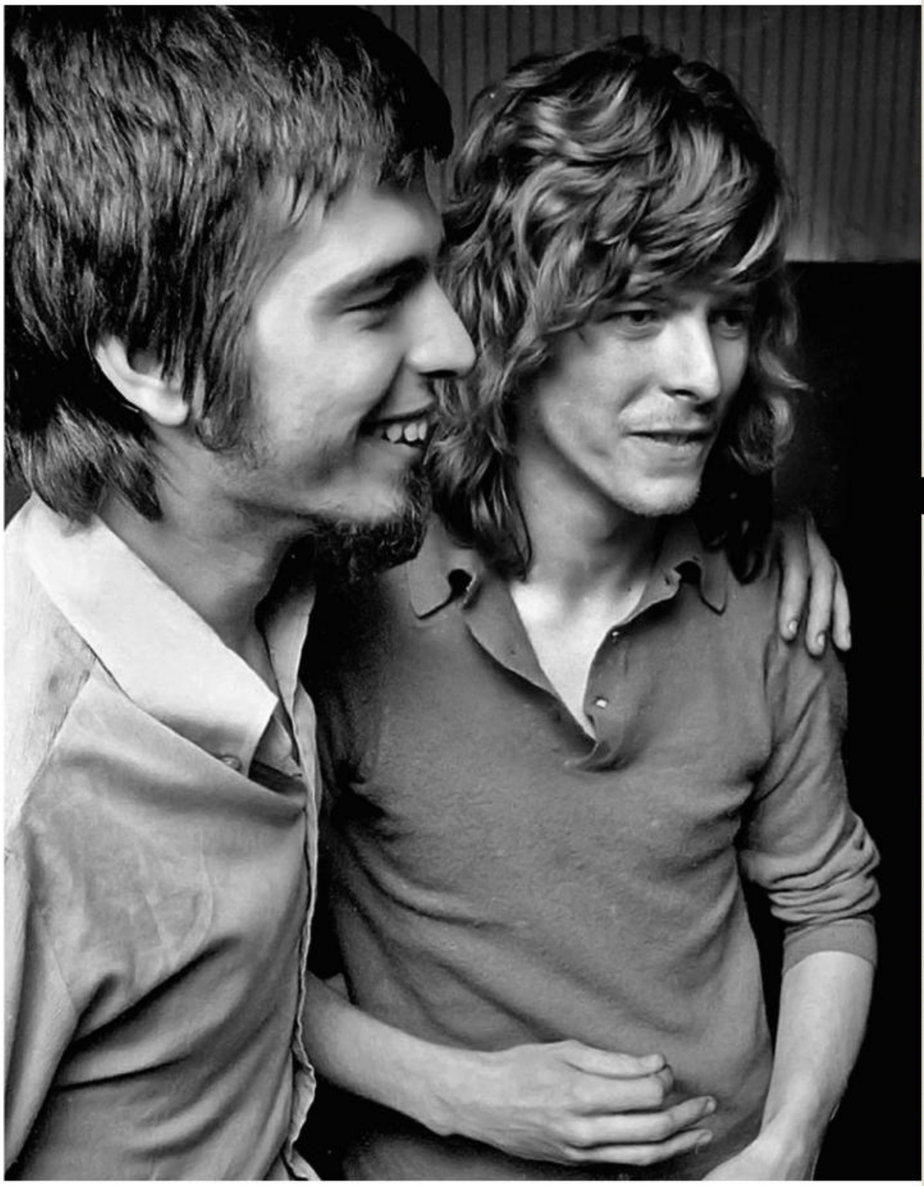
Ronson also quickly became frustrated with Bowie's then-drummer, John Chamberlain, and suggested a replacement. That replacement, Mick 'Woody' Woodmansey, recalled his first impression of Bowie as a musician who was being an artist 24/7: "Although he really hadn't got it figured out at that time, I looked on him as an artist in preparation. He had all these ideas but he hadn't really sorted out a direction. And he didn't really know rock'n'roll music at that time. Which is where the band came in."

The other major player who entered Bowie's life that spring was Tony Defries. In April, Bowie had his fateful first meeting with the bushy-haired, cigar-smoking 26-year-old litigation clerk and would-be show business agent. His role model was Elvis's manager Colonel Tom Parker, and Defries was convinced he'd found his Elvis. He seemed to intuit all Bowie's career angst, and made big promises: he'd get Bowie out of his management contract with Ken Pitt; he'd get him onto a better label; he'd make him "bigger than everybody". All Bowie had to do was be creative and write songs. He'd take care of the rest.

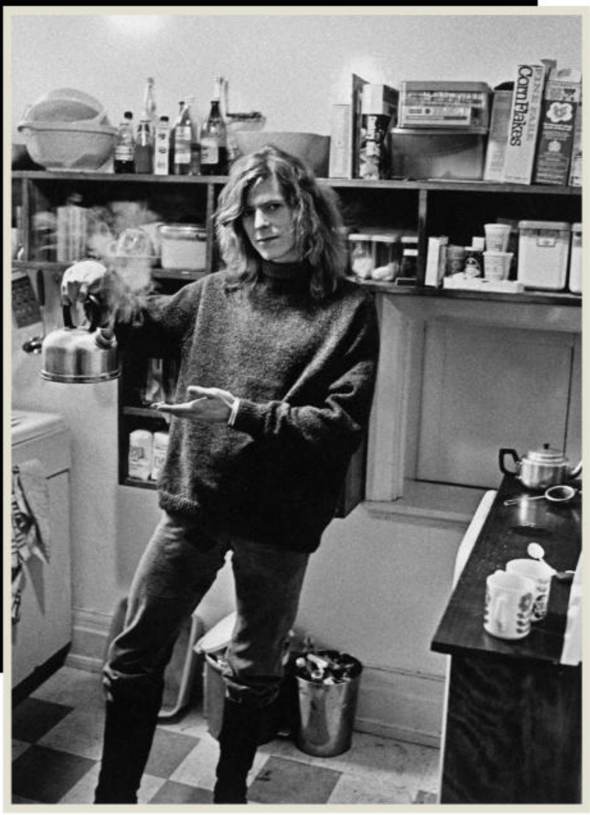
Three years later, Bowie told BBC Radio 1: "He said: 'I'm going to make you a star!' 'Oh yeah?' And he did… so they say. I've read about it. That's when Tony Defries entered my life – and me wallet!"



David Bowie (and right with his friend and producer Tony Visconti) at Trident Studios in London, May 1970.



Music maker and tea maker at his ground-floor flat at Haddon Hall in Beckenham in 1970.



ALAMY x4

Many legal battles loomed ahead, and it would be 1982 before Bowie would fully extract himself from the management contract with Defries that he said was "the worst decision of my life".

Meanwhile, back at Haddon Hall in spring 1970, the new group started rehearsing in the wine cellar. Visconti said in *The Golden Years*: "We cleaned it up and put up eight crates on the wall as soundproofing. To this day I don't think those crates ever worked. We got a lot of complaints from the neighbours, as we spent weeks down there. We made this album our job, and by the time we got into the studio we were very well-rehearsed. It was just a matter of putting all the tracks down and recording it."

But upon entering the studio, Bowie was procrastinating about finishing melodies and lyrics for the instrumentals that the band were assembling. Visconti recalled: "Mick, Woody and myself would be making up backing tracks, having got a brief from David – it was an E chord for 16 bars, then an A chord for four bars – and we were just banging out these backing tracks, and David would come into the studio and say whether he liked it or not."

Royal Academy-trained pianist Ralph Mace was brought in to play a Moog synthesiser. "It was creation in the studio," Mace said in Peter and Leni Gillman's *Alias David Bowie*. "They began with a basic idea from one instrument or one vocal line. They would start adding and would change according to their whims. David bounced ideas off people. There was a lot of creative interplay."

But for all the collaboration, only Bowie's name would appear on the songwriting credits. "It's hard to say how much you do when you write a song with someone else," Visconti said. "And even though we weren't credited as writers, Mick and I were getting the chord changes together. *The Width Of A Circle* was the only track that was written, and that was only the first part of the song. The second part was written in the studio, and Mick and I definitely wrote all that, and David just threw all his words and melody on top."

It's not clear why Bowie didn't assert control more. It could be that he wasn't yet confident enough to assert himself, thinking it best to let the more experienced musicians run the show. Engineer Ken Scott, who would be in the producer's chair for Bowie's next three breakthrough albums, said in a YouTube interview: "Tony and Mick did take over. How much it was David not wanting to have anything to do with it, and how much was Tony taking over, I don't know. But I think it was more Tony's ideas on the album than David's."

Or it could have simply been that Bowie was formulating the working method that would give his coming decade of albums such spontaneity and character. On *TMWSTW*, the songs are almost more interesting for what they hint at than what they are: *The Width Of A Circle*, with its eight-minute ramble through tempo and mood shifts, is a precursor to *Station To Station*; *She Shook Me Cold* foreshadows Ziggy's glam sexuality; *Saviour Machine* is a queasy dystopian preview of *Diamond Dogs; All The Madmen* and *The Supermen* move deep into the lyrical themes ⊳

"As far as the label was concerned, this was the last they had to do with David."

Tony Visconti

The man who (eventually) wowed the word: Bowie at Haddon Hall in 1970.

"I enjoyed being able to hybridise these different kinds of music. As if to say: 'Wow, this is no longer rock'n'roll.'"

David Bowie

of alienation and loneliness that Bowie explored throughout his career.

For much of the album, the songs seem to wander away from the singer, turning into extended jams. Then suddenly, on the last two songs, everything snaps into focus.

It was the final day of mixing, and Bowie still hadn't come up with words for the second-to-last track. With Visconti waiting impatiently at the console, Bowie hunkered down in the studio lobby and scratched out what became the title track and the best one on the album.

Bowie later referred to the song as "trance-like", saying: "My state of mind when I was writing it was as near to a mystical state as a nineteen-year-old can get into. It was at a time when I was sort of studying Buddhism."

Visconti referred to this as "writing on microphone". He said in *David Bowie: A Life*: "David would start singing spontaneously. It was really wonderful. When he was hot, he was hot. But for me the whole thing was not so good. I had two big conflicts: getting this done technically, which I was struggling with, and also managing to get a good performance out of David. I had a record company screaming for final mixes, not even sure that they wanted this album. As far as they were concerned, this was the last they had to do with David Bowie and I wasn't delivering the goods."

The Man Who Sold The World was released on November 4, 1970 in the US, and April 10 the following year in the UK. *Rolling Stone* decribed it "intriguing and chilling". *Phonograph Record* praised it for "trying to define some new province of modern music".

In support of the album, Bowie did a brief tour of US college radio stations, showing up in his Mr. Fish dress, confounding and charming DJs. But since Olav Wyper, his champion at the label, had departed, Mercury did little to promote the record. By early 1971, Tony Defries was already busy engineering Bowie's move to RCA Victor.

The pushy manager's increasingly hands-on presence in Bowie's life ended up forcing Visconti out of the picture and on towards his fruitful partnership with Marc Bolan and T.Rex. "David was assigning his power to other people," Visconti said in *The Golden Years*. "When he meets someone, and he falls in love, forget it. The person's the one until he's severely hurt. I said to David: 'If you go with Tony Defries, I'm not going to go with you.'"

The album enjoyed a brief resurgence in 1974 after Lulu had a UK No.3 hit with her cover of the title track. Produced by Bowie and Mick Ronson, and featuring the Spiders From Mars as a backing band, it veered even further towards the Berlin cabaret feel that was hinted at in the original.

"I didn't think *The Man Who Sold The World* was the best song for my voice, but it was such a strong song in itself," Lulu told author Marc Spitz. "Bowie kept telling me to smoke more cigarettes, to give my voice a certain quality."

In 2020, Tony Visconti returned to the original tapes of *The Man Who Sold The World* to create a 50th-anniversary stereo remix. To distinguish it from the usual remasters, it was given its intended title, *Metrobolist*, and used the sleeve illustration from the alternative US 1970 release. But even with the fresh take, *TMWSTW* still occupies a strange place in Bowie's discography. Rarely listed as a favourite or in a top-five, it's a preview of the conceptual, harmonically adventurous artist who would find much fuller flower on the two albums he would make just around the bend, and an entrance way to the unparalleled string of masterpieces to follow over the decade – from *Aladdin Sane* to *Scary Monsters*.

David Bowie once described his artistic vision to me as it bloomed in the early 1970s: "What my true style was is that I loved the idea of putting Little Richard with Jacques Brel, and the Velvet Underground backing them. What would that sound like? It really seemed that what I was good at doing and what I enjoyed was being able to hybridise these different kinds of music. As if to say: 'Wow, this is no longer rock'n'roll. This is an art form. This is something really exciting!'"

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AIN'T NOTHING LIKE THE REAL

On Nashville's mainstream country highway, the **Brothers Osborne** have marked out their own independent lane. Now, having weathered a few years of personal disclosures that might have derailed their career, they return with an album that celebrates freedom and inclusiveness.

Words: **Bill DeMain**

"That one says 'Rebel Without A Clue'." John Osborne is offering up his left arm to show a blue-inked phrase from a favourite Tom Petty song. We're sitting in his mood-lit, vintage gear-jammed home studio in East Nashville, and he and his younger brother TJ, both friendly goliaths in jeans and T-shirts, are giving *Classic Rock* a quick tour of

THING

their respective tattoos. There are mandalas, Hank Williams, Jimi Hendrix, Black-eyed Susans, the state flower of Maryland, where the duo grew up. Both have "the five hashmark", which represents all five siblings in their family. TJ's '225', which many fans have speculated as being "some mystical reference", is actually a homage to an 80s Buick that their dad drove. But it's that Petty quote, from *Into The Great Wide Open*, that resonates the most.

"Rebel without a clue," John says. "I've always thought that was insanely poetic. That's kind of what we are – rebels against conforming to society and societal standards. And the last few years have very much been about going into a kind of great wide open for us."

John is referring to "the very personal things" that he and TJ have publicly disclosed about themselves. For John it was a struggle with depression and anxiety that had him considering not only quitting music, but even ending his life. For TJ it was coming out as gay. "Art should reflect life," John says. "It's not like we weren't who we are on earlier records, but we weren't *fully* who we are. Now we just feel like we have no limitations."

"This record was the first time we were able to truly create something without having any filters on," says TJ. ▷

"This record" is *Brothers Osborne,* their fourth album, self-titled "because it's the meeting point between who we've become and who we've always been," TJ explains. And it has an exhilarating rush of newfound freedom. The duo have an ideal collaborative partner in producer Mike Elizondo, a Dr. Dre protégé who's worked with artists including Eminem, Carrie Underwood and Lake Street Dive. With an array of top Nashville session players on board, and Paul McCartney's longtime powerhouse drummer Abe Laboriel Jr., they deliver 11 songs' worth of arena-ready rollicking riffs, modern dance beats (including drum machines) and buoyant shout-along choruses that feel like an all-kinds-of-kinds pep rally. At the heart are John's down-home, bluesy guitar heroics and TJ's baritone voice.

The Brothers describe their hybrid-rich sound as "a hundred per cent all over the place" (on the subject of current favourite records, they list everything from JJ Cale and Daryl Scott to AC/DC and Dua Lipa), and that leads to some discussion about what makes something country these days.

"I don't find it surprising that classic rock publications are looking at country, because it reflects a lot of that sound," says John. "I mean, Mutt Lange produced *Back In Black* and then went on to produce Shania Twain. So there's a lot of overlap."

"The interesting flip is," TJ says, "in Nashville, if it gets *too* rock, then it's like: 'Wait, that's not going to work for country.' Then we go to the UK, and they say: 'Well you don't say country here, it's *rock*.'

"In the UK you can actually say 'c**t', but you can't say 'country'," John adds with a laugh.

"We weren't *fully* who we are [on earlier records]. Now we just feel like we have no limitations."

John Osborne

Back home, country music is where the Brothers Osborne sit, although they feel more kinship with fellow outliers like Kacey Musgraves, Ashley McBryde and Jason Isbell. In the world at large in 2023, TJ and John's recent personal revelations may not seem earth shaking. In Nashville, which can be conservative and harshly reactionary, they are. Around Music City there's always the worry of the career-halting "Dixie Chicks effect".

"There's definitely a fear of putting yourself out there in full light due to running the risk of judgment," says TJ. "I'd gotten so good at dancing around my sexuality and personal life in interviews, I didn't realise what a daily weight it had become."

"For me, with my mental health stuff, I felt like I was always walking along the edge of a cliff," says John, remembering a scary moment during the making of 2020's *Skeletons,* when he felt so paralysed that he couldn't physically enter the studio.

Keep in mind that the Osbornes were already well established. They'd won five Country Music Association awards for Vocal Duo Of The Year, been nominated for seven Grammys (and won one), had platinum sales, charted with Top 10 hits such as *Stay A Little Longer* and *It Ain't My Fault,* and surpassed two and a half billion streams globally. With a major-label deal, a large team and many on the payroll, the stakes were high.

"We were very lucky to have everyone in our corner – management, label, our band and crew," John says. "We're all like family, and they would go down on a sinking ship with us if it came to that."

TJ adds: "Before I came out, a friend said: 'Dude, I would be really shocked if any one of those people would prefer you to be unhappy just so they could keep their job.' And I was like: 'Boom', that's it.'"

Were there reciprocal 'boom' moments for the siblings as they shared their situations?

"Well, I knew that John was dealing with some things," TJ says, "but I didn't realise the magnitude of it until it reared its head. The beauty is that he was able to get to a place where he could talk freely about it."

"And I knew about TJ, but it wasn't my place to ask," John says.

"When he saw my internet search history, he *really* knew," TJ says, and both of them dissolve in deep-chested laughter.

"Seriously, before we got signed I told John that I intend on coming out at some point because I don't want to live my life closeted," says TJ. "It took a lot longer than I thought it would. I didn't want it to seem opportunistic. There are so few things in life that go the way you want them to, but that happened how we wanted it to happen."

When I mention that the usual country music default go-to in times of stress and uncertainty is God, the brothers look at each other and then say in tandem: "Yeah, we're definitely *not* religious."

"We never went to church as kids," says John. "And whatever God is, I don't think it judges everybody. Putting an inner critic in someone and then calling her God is quite cruel."

TJ: "I like the Ricky Gervais bit where he's talking about how there are three thousand gods that people pray to and believe in. He's an atheist, talking to someone who believes in one god, and says: 'You don't believe in 2,999 gods, and I don't believe in just one more.' That's so funny."

If there was any gospel for the Osborne brothers growing up in Deale, a small blue-collar town south of Baltimore, it was one of hard work and ambition. John and TJ, given the same first and middle names but in reverse order (John Thomas, Thomas John), are the sons of musical parents who also run a successful plumbing business. Back then, just beyond the family van, kitted out with gaskets and hoses, there was a shed with a reel-to-reel tape recorder set-up in it.

"Plumbing definitely prepared us to work our asses off," says TJ. "I've crawled under more houses than I can count, fixing things. The hard work of the music business was something we've never been afraid of."

"Fixing sinks and toilets with our dad certainly gave us an added zest to be successful at music," John says, "so we didn't have to go back to it!"

John says that in high school his younger brother was a "rebellious kid who skipped classes and marched to the beat of his own drum". TJ describes John as "the grunge guy, big on Nirvana, with long hair and JNCO jeans". Before turning to guitars, they both played violin in the high-school orchestra ("If you'd heard us, you would've never thought: 'Those boys have a future in music,'" John says laughing).

Men on a mission, wanting their music to bring people together: John (left) and TJ Osborne.

And were they close?

"Yeah. I mean, we slept in bunk beds until I graduated high school," John says.

"We still do when we're on tour," TJ adds with a laugh.

Their parents wrote country songs and made regular trips to Nashville, paving the way for their sons to do the same. John came first, in 2007. TJ followed not long after.

"I got so good at dancing around my sexuality in interviews, I didn't realise what a daily weight it had become."

TJ Osborne

NATALIE OSBORNE/PRESS

"The last couple of years have been going a hundred miles an hour for us," says TJ, "so there may be a perception that we had this overnight success. But we've been in Nashville for over fifteen years, playing, writing, recording. There was a lot of failure, a lot of heartbreak, a lot of 'no's' that happened year after year, to the point where we though maybe we should stop. But the perseverance saw us through."

And now they're days away from playing four sold-out special record release shows in New York, Nashville, DC and LA. From there they will ramp up to a full-scale world tour in 2024. For John, who's a new dad to twins with his wife, singer-songwriter Lucie Silvas (the joyous arrival came after years of IVF treatments and waiting), it will be a challenge.

"We've already been on the road, and it's very difficult," he says. "I miss them every day. But we're lucky though that we live in an era where they're just a FaceTime away. I can't imagine what it was like when you had to find a pay phone or a phone at the hotel to talk to your family."

He adds with a laugh: "It's like those old Willie Nelson movies where he's at a gas station pay phone: 'Can I talk to the baby?'"

Wherever the road takes them, the Brothers Osborne have become, in their words, "bullshit bulletproof", embracing the hard-won openness and freedom they've found in the past few years.

"We're progressive people who grew up in a very conservative town, and to some extent still live in one," John says. "We're used to bridging the divide, and we would love our music to do that as well."

"Our music is about making a place for everyone," says TJ. "At our shows, I'll sometimes look out and see a 'MAGA' [Make America Great Again] hat, then four people over is someone with a Pride shirt on. And I think: 'Man, that's really cool that these people can come together and have different ideals.' And it's happening at our gig. That's really the power of music."

Brothers Osborne is out now via Snakefarm.

Thirty years ago, **Guns N' Roses** released *The Spaghetti Incident?*, an album of covers, and brought a load of mostly obscure, mostly punk-rock tracks to a wider audience. We take a look at the originals that fired up Axl and co. enough to want to record their own versions.

Words: **Dave Everley**

Thirty years after it was released, *The Spaghetti Incident?* remains the strangest and most misunderstood album Guns N' Roses released. Coming on the heels of the blockbusting *Use Your Illusion* pair, this collection of (mostly) punk covers recorded during the *UYI* sessions and between dates on the subsequent tour was a curve ball from one of the biggest rock bands on the planet.

"These were all songs we played in soundcheck or live over the years," GN'R bassist Duff McKagan explains to *Classic Rock*. "There was no plan to start with. We recorded a few songs, and then it was like, let's just make a record."

Guns N' Roses were a hard rock band with punk rock in their hearts. Duff had played in punk bands The Fartz and The Fastbacks in his native Seattle, but everyone was on board.

"It was Axl who loved the UK Subs, he found *Down On The Farm*," says Duff. "We figured, if we make this record and it sells, then if nothing else some of our heroes can get some royalties."

The reviews that greeted *The Spaghetti Incident?* upon its release in November 1993 veered between the perplexed and the hostile. It sold just a million copies in the US – small change next to *Appetite For Destruction*, but enough to boost both the profile and the bank balance of those who wrote the songs that GN'R had covered on it. These are the stories behind those original songs.

Since I Don't Have You

THE SKYLINERS

The Spaghetti Incident? may have been a Guns N' Roses punk-rock covers album, and the most punk-rock thing they did on it was to kick the whole thing off with an unironic cover of Pittsburgh doo-wop group The Skyliners' 1958 single *Since I Don't Have You.*

The song dated back to an era when rock'n'roll had yet to fully get its claws into America's youth. In their pressed suits, shirts and ties – and in the case of co-vocalist Janet Vogel, billowing dress – The Skyliners looked more like trainee accountants than like pop stars, but their version of *Since I Don't Have You* reached No.12 in the US in early 1959. In a 1993 radio interview, Slash revealed that Axl constantly sang the song when the two of them lived together during GN'R's early days. "I don't know why I really liked that song, I just did," Axl said, adding wryly: "Punk rock at its finest."

New Rose

THE DAMNED

It's the greatest recycled intro of all time: "Is she really going out with him?" First heard in 1964 as the opening of The Shangri-Las' immaculate teenage death-ride anthem *Leader Of The Pack*, it was repurposed 12 years later by The Damned for *New Rose*, their debut single and the first by a British punk band.

"Dave [Vanian, singer] was waiting for the drums to start up, and he goes: 'Is she really going out with him?'" original Damned guitarist Brian James says of the Shangri-Las homage. "We didn't even know Nick [Lowe, producer] left it in until we heard the single for the first time."

Devious or not, it fired the starting pistol for an entire movement. James had written the *New Rose* riff while he was temporarily living in Belgium with his pre-Damned band Bastard. "The drummer couldn't get his head around it, so I sat on it," says James. ▷

GEORGE CHIN/ICONICPIX

> **"We figured if we make this record and it sells, then if nothing else some of our heroes can get some royalties."**
>
> **Duff McKagan**

The Damned

The Skyliners

"None of us gave a f**k about having the first punk single. It was only the managers who cared."

The Damned's Brian James on *New Rose*

He had more luck when he returned to London after Bastard fell apart in late 1974. The following year, he began putting together the band that would become The Damned, starting with drummer Rat Scabies (real name Chris Millar).

"I played him that riff and he picked up on it straight away," says James. "This was when it was just the two of us – Captain [Sensible, bassist] wasn't even on the scene then."

James fleshed out the song in less than three hours in his flat in Kilburn. The amphetamine drum tattoo that kicks everything off came from Scabies. "I said: 'Let's have some jungle drums as an intro.' And Rat did something totally unexpected. It was crazy from the outset."

James's lyrics matched the song's musical endorphin rush. It wasn't about a woman, says the guitarist, so much as a feeling. "The only thing I can think of is that it must have been about the punk scene. Suddenly there was a bunch people who loved The Stooges and the MC5 as much as I did."

New Rose was released as a single in October 1976 on Stiff Records, beating the Sex Pistols' *Anarchy In The UK* by three months. "None of us gave a fuck about having the first punk single," says James. "It was only the managers who cared about all that."

After the Damned's temporary split in 1978, James went on to form Lords Of The New Church. In August 1986, the Lords played a show in Glendora, just outside LA. The support act that night were a pre-fame Guns N' Roses. "All I remember is their drummer had a leopardskin-covered drum kit," says James. "A couple of years later they were everywhere."

The circle was completed when GN'R covered *New Rose* on *The Spaghetti Incident?* – which James only found out via an article in *Rolling Stone*: "They asked Slash what he'd been recording lately, and he said they'd done a Wings song and *New Rose*. I thought: 'Fucking hell! I might make some money from it for the first time in my life!'"

Down On The Farm

UK SUBS

It was the middle of the night in London, some time at the end of the 80s, when Charlie Harper was woken up by his phone ringing. A guy with an American accent on the other end of the line introduced himself as Duff McKagan. He was at a party in Los Angeles with the Subs' then-manager, and he wanted to know if it would be okay if his band, Guns N' Roses, covered Harpers band the UK Subs' song *Down On The Farm*. "Sure," said Harper, then went back to sleep.

Originally appearing on the Subs' 1982 album *Endangered Species, Down On The Farm* is one of punk's great anthems of boredom. "All I need is some inspiration, before I do somebody some harm," Harper drawls blankly at the start of the track. But this was no nihilistic rant at the futility of life. It was literally about being cooped up on a farm – specifically, Jacob's Farm, a residential studio in Surrey.

"Lovely place," Harper says now. "But I was trying to write lyrics for this brilliant music Alvin [Gibbs, Subs bassist] had come up with, and failing."

Stuck in the studio while his bandmates relaxed in the farm's pool, Harper became increasingly frustrated. "I started feeling really depressed. And that's when it all came along."

The finished song barely keeps a lid on its frustration. *'Boredom eats me like cancer,'* sings Harper, adding the coup de grace towards the song's conclusion: *'Everything smells like horseshit, down here on the farm.'* "That was true," he says. "There was a stable with horses. Everything did smell like horseshit. The owners thought it was funny."

Guns N' Roses' version of the song made its first appearance at the Farm Aid festival in Indianapolis in April 1990, before they recorded a faithful version – give or take Axl's Dick Van Dyke London accent – for *The Spaghetti Incident?*. It got a run out on the band's last tour, most notably at the Glastonbury festival at Worthy Farm, where the *'everything smells like horse shit'* line came with piquancy.

"It's such a simple piece of music, but so effective," says Harper, who has been known to introduce it as "a cover of a Guns N' Roses song". The only line that makes him wince now is: *'I'd rather be back in Soho, than down on the farm.'*

"That's turned on me now," he says. "I'd rather be anywhere else on the planet than there these days."

UK Subs' Charlie Harper

GETTY x3

Iggy Pop

New York Dolls

Dead Boys' Stiv Bators
(Below: T.Rex's Marc Bolan)

"Axl called Slash and said: 'Let's get the band together, we're covering this Dead Boys song.'"

Michael Monroe

Human Being
THE NEW YORK DOLLS

The New York Dolls' self-titled 1972 debut album is one of the foundation stones of both punk and 80s glam-rock – a staggering, slurring missive from the gutters of the Big Apple, complete with bird's-nest hair and lipstick smears.

Prophetically titled second album *Too Much Too Soon*, which stripped away what vestiges of professionalism had been present on the debut, sounded like the work of a band who could barely stand upright. Never more so than on final track *Human Being*, a barely produced blast of hissing punk noise that buried singer David Johansen's sneers and howls deep within layers of fuzzy guitars, that sounded like they couldn't wait to leave the studio to get their next fix.

Guns N' Roses' version buffed up the sound into something listenable – how could they not have? – but lost some of the original's band-in-the-process-of-falling-apart anti-charm in the process.

Raw Power
THE STOOGES

Stooges fan David Bowie had taken on the task of producing The Stooges' third album, *Raw Power*, partly hoping his own growing fame would finally help catapult them to stardom. But it wasn't to be. A combination of bad drug habits, volatile personalities and Bowie's underpowered production meant *Raw Power* barely got off the ground. The Stooges themselves fell apart a year later following a riotous final gig in which Iggy Pop took on a whole chapter of Hells Angels, but their fucked-up spirit had seeped into the very bones of rock'n'roll.

Guns N' Roses could match The Stooges for debauchery, and laid down two Stooges covers for *The Spaghetti Incident?*: an instrumental version of *Down On The Street* from 1970's *Funhouse*, and the Duff McKagan-sung *Raw Power*. The latter won the day, and survives in GN'R's set-lists to this day, while Iggy returned the favour by having Duff appear on his most recent album, *Every Loser*.

Ain't It Fun
DEAD BOYS

Dead Boys were the troglodyte wing of the 70s New York punk scene. Ditching arty intellectualism, the transplanted Clevelanders were an explosion of instinct and attitude, propelled by Cheetah Chrome's broken-glass guitar and charisma-bomb frontman Stiv Bators's playing-dumb sneer.

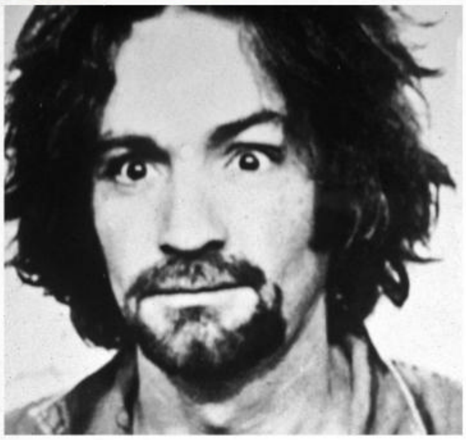
Ain't It Fun began life as a song by Chrome's previous band, Rocket From The Tombs. In its original incarnation, it was five and half minutes of post-Watergate nihilism with a side-order of provocation: "Ain't it fun when you tell her she's just a c**t," drawled RFTT singer David Thomas, before the track exploded into shards of noise.

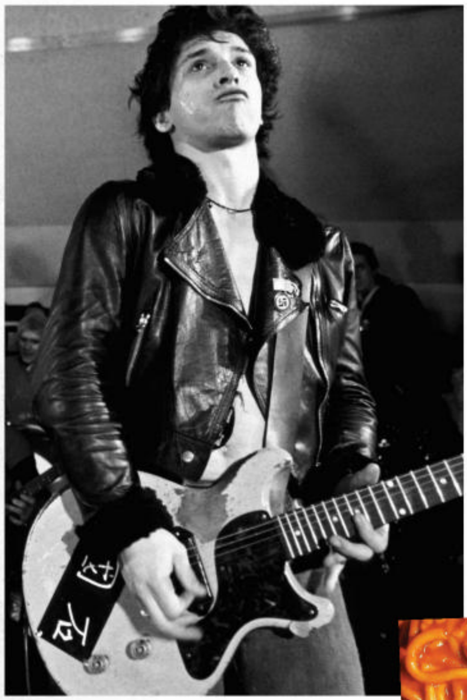
The Dead Boys kept the neutron-star energy that burned at its heart, but added a wired edge that the original lacked, with Bators – one part Johnny Rotten and one part Sid Vicious – shifting from snivelling whisper to mush-mouthed aggro in an instant.

It was the Dead Boys' version that Guns N' Roses used as a touchstone for their own cover. The inspiration came via ex-Hanoi Rocks frontman Mike Monroe, a friend of both Bators and Axl Rose. When Axl told Monroe he wasn't familiar with the Dead Boys, Monroe made him a cassette.

"We were driving around Hollywood in Axl's car when *Ain't It Fun* came on. Axl said: 'Wow, this a great song," Monroe, who appeared on the finished version, told *Classic Rock*. "He immediately called Slash and said: 'Let's get the band together, we're covering this Dead Boys song.'" ▷

GETTY x4





Clockwise from top left: Charles Manson, Misfits, Johnny Thunders

Buick Mackane (Big Dumb Sex)

T.REX/SOUNDGARDEN

Marc Bolan described T.Rex's *Buick Mackane* as "Zep Rex" – a nod to the fact that it was heavier than the cosmic-dandy glam-rock that had propelled Bolan's group to fame. GN'R took it one step further with their version of the 1973 song from T.Rex's *The Slider* album, dropping in a burst of Soundgarden's *Big Dumb Sex* towards the end.

The latter was a curious choice – Soundgarden's *Big Dumb Sex*, which appeared on 1989's *Louder Than Love*, was a mocking take-down of what guitarist Kim Thayil called "butt rock" and "stupid music".

It's not clear whether they had Guns N' Roses in mind when they wrote it, although in his defence, Axl had been a cheerleader for the Soundgarden long before the rest of the world caught on. When in a 1989 interview *Rolling Stone* asked him who he'd been listening to, he replied: "I enjoy Soundgarden. The singer just buries me."

He made good on his fandom by inviting the Seattle band to open for GN'R and Metallica on their co-headlining tour in 1991. Two years later, that *Buick Mackane/Big Dumb Sex* mash-up proved he was either in on the joke or completely oblivious to it.

"There was no plan to start with. We recorded a few songs, and then it was like, let's just make a record."

Duff McKagan

Hair Of The Dog

NAZARETH

When Scottish rockers Nazareth told their label, A&M, that they planned to call their new album *Son Of A Bitch*, they got a swift response. "They went: 'No, you can't do that, we won't be able to sell it,'" says bassist Pete Agnew. "We went: 'Hang on, if John Wayne can say it, why can't we?' But they weren't having it."

Agnew still calls the 1975 album, and its barrelling title track, Son Of A Bitch today, although the rest of the world knows it as *Hair Of The Dog* (a play on 'Heir Of The Dog', itself a twist on that original title). That song, featuring singer Dan McCafferty's wind-tunnel vocal, a killer talk-box guitar solo from guitarist Manny Charlton and more cowbell than is legal in some US states, is the tale of an alluring but devious woman who finally meets her match. *'Now you're messing with a sonofabitch,'* McCafferty howls gleefully.

The song caught the attention of a young Axl Rose, whose rasping howl sailed close to McCafferty's. Axl enlisted Manny Charlton to produce an early, pre-*Appetite For Destruction* demo, but the guitarist grumbled that he couldn't get all of the band in the studio at the same time.

When Nazareth played half a dozen dates in California in April 1988, Guns N' Roses turned up to all of them. "They were nice kids," says Agnew. "Very polite."

It was no surprise that they chose to cover *Hair Of The Dog* on *The Spaghetti Incident?*, cheekily adding a snippet of *Day Tripper* on the end in acknowledgement of the original's passing similarity to The Beatles song.

"It's good, but they didn't really do much with it," Agnew says of GN'R's version of his own band's song. "We had great success covering other people's songs, but we always put our own stamp on it. I think Axl just wanted to sing *'son of a bitch'*."

GETTY x3

Clockwise from top left: Fear's Lee Ving, Sex Pistols' Paul Cooke and Steve Jones, Nazareth

Attitude
MISFITS

It was Metallica, not Guns N' Roses, who put America's greatest cult punk band back on the map five years after they split. Metallica's 1987 mash-up of New Jersey horror-punks Misfits' *Last Caress* and *Green Hell* introduced the Glenn Danzig-fronted band to a generation of thrash kids.

GN'R may have been late out of the gate with their own Misfits cover, but they picked a doozy. *Attitude* was a rush of catchy, goth-tinged punk'n'roll that appeared on the B-side of the New Jersey band's 1978 single *Bullet*. Misfits looked like a bunch of grave diggers at a Halloween party, with thick black eyeliner and distinctive 'devilocks' – fringes styled forward into a point that hung down to their chins.

"We weren't drug-shooting beatnik Bowery Boys," founding bassist Jerry Only says. "That's why we came up with the horror thing. We loved horror films, sci-fi, B-movies."

Attitude wasn't a horror-punk track so much as a blast of pure, well, attitude. "When we did the lines *'I got some fuckin' attitude'*, nobody was saying 'fuck' every second word in 1978," says Only. "Back then we were doing that to be socially obnoxious."

Attitude was lined up to appear on Misfits' debut album, *Static Age*, but label disinterest and an acrimonious split with Danzig meant the record remained unreleased until 1997, four years after GN'R hopped on the Misfits bandwagon.

Today, Danzig and Only have patched up their differences and are again playing under the Misfits name, headlining festivals and arenas. America's greatest cult punk band are a cult no longer.

Black Leather
SEX PISTOLS

Black Leather might be credited to the Sex Pistols, but the band that recorded it wasn't just unrecognisable from the one that had made *Never Mind The Bollocks*, they didn't even exist by the time it snuck out in 1980.

After Johnny Rotten left following a disastrous US tour in January 1978 to form PiL, manager Malcolm McLaren urged guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook and doomed bassist Sid Vicious to carry on without the talismanic singer.

In the spring of 1978, this rump Sex Pistols entered the studio to record a grab-bag of songs for the soundtrack to an entertainingly shambolic film-come-art-statement McLaren was planning called *The Great Rock'N'Roll Swindle*. Among them was *Black Leather*, a bondage-fixated slab of buffed-up rock'n'roll with Jones on vocals and bass as well as guitar.

The first the world heard of *Black Leather* was when it was covered by LA punks The Runaways on their 1978 album *And Now… The Runaways*. Perversely, McLaren opted to drop the Jones/Cook version from *The Great Rock'N'Roll Swindle* when the film was released in 1980. Instead it slipped onto the seven-inch singles collection *Pistols Pack*, by which time Jones and Cook had formed their new band The Professionals (the seeds of that group were undeniably in *Black Leather*).

By the end of the 80s, Jones had relocated to LA and released two solo albums, *Mercy* and *Fire And Gasoline*, the latter including a version of another Pistols semi-obscurity, *I Did U No Wrong*. And singing backing vocals on that cover? Axl Rose.

You Can't Put Your Arms Around A Memory
JOHNNY THUNDERS

Steve Lillywhite was 23 years old and barely out of the gate career-wise when he signed on to co-produce Johnny Thunders's debut solo album, *So Alone*, in early 1978. As a staff producer at Island Records, he'd worked with the John Foxx-fronted Ultravox! and Eddie And The Hot Rods, among

ADRIAN BOOT x1; GETTY x2

The Spaghetti Incident? **GN'R line-up at the 1992 MTV VMAs: (l-r) Duff McKagan, Gilby Clark, Axl Rose, Slash, Dizzy Reed and Matt Sorum.**

"That song doesn't sound perfect. Some might say the guitar is out of tune. But that's why it resonates so well – there's a humanity to it."

Producer Steve Lillywhite on *You Can't Put Your Arms Around A Memory*

others, but the inelegantly wasted ex-New York Dolls and Heartbreakers guitarist was a different prospect altogether.

"Johnny was friends with my room-mate and so I got to know him," Lillywhite tells *Classic Rock*. "The Heartbreakers album [1977's *L.A.M.F.*] didn't sound great, so I said: 'Let me do your solo album. I'll guarantee you get a good-sounding record.' Of course, I was bluffing completely."

Lillywhite and Thunders entered The Fallout Shelter, a studio in the dingy basement of Island's West London offices. "It was this funky old studio with no natural light," says Lillywhite. "It was the perfect way to record Johnny Thunders."

Thunders was deep in the grip of heroin addiction. "He was a lovely, lovely guy – when you got him on a good day," says Lillywhite. The guitarist's well-connected manager, BP Fallon, recruited a stellar cast list to play on the album, including Phil Lynott, Steve Marriott, Sex Pistols duo Steve Jones and Paul Cook, and Only Ones frontman Peter Perrett.

It was Perrett, himself no stranger to the needle, who would help bring the album's stand-out track – and the highlight of Thunders's solo career – to life. *You Can't Put Your Arms Around A Memory* was a broken-down ballad that found this strung-out New York alley cat at his most vulnerable.

"Peter helped me understand the sort of person Johnny was," says Lillywhite. "'Get him today, Steve, because he's not hurting, he's on good form.' Because on other days he'd be nodding off all the time."

Also playing on the track were Eddie And The Hot Rods bassist Paul Grey and Only Ones drummer Mike Kellie. Perrett provided guitar and backing vocals, although *You Can't Put Your Arms Around A Memory* was pure Thunders. Part junkie confessional, part snarl of defiance, it was the sound of a man writing his epitaph – his own *My Way*.

It would be Thunders fanatic Duff McKagan who sang on GN'R's cover of the song, adding an impromptu tribute to the guitarist, who died of drug-related causes in 1991.

"That song doesn't sound perfect by modern thinking," Lillywhite says of the original. "Some might say the guitar is out of tune. But that's why it resonates so well, there's a humanity to it."

I Don't Care About You

FEAR

Even by the standards of LA's early punk scene, Fear thrived on provocation. They were formed by jazz and blues-loving ex-soldier Lee Capallero, who moved cross country to California, and reinvented himself as Lee Ving and as American punk's button-pusher-in-chief.

Fear's 1983 debut album, *The Record*, was a satirical dissection of modern American culture, poking fun at everything from arty hipsters to left-leaning punk rockers. The bluntly titled *I Don't Care About You* wrapped up their whole ethos in two minutes of roaring rock'n'roll. *'I don't care about you, fuck you!'* Ving bawled on the chorus, although a weird kind of compassion shone through when he sang: *'I've seen a old man have a heart attack in Manhattan/Well he died while we just stood there lookin' at him'*. Cynical, or empathetic? Maybe Guns N' Roses noticed a little bit of both in it.

Look At Your Game, Girl

CHARLES MANSON

In the late 60s, Charles Manson pursued two parallel careers: one as a musician, the other as a racist, psychopathic cult leader. Unfortunately for the seven people who died at the hands of his followers, he was more successful at the latter than the former, although that didn't stop him amassing a stockpile of songs that he hoped would turn him into a star.

Among them was *Look At Your Game, Girl*, a pared-down acoustic track that sounded like the work of a fifth-rate LA troubadour. Written in 1968, the song remained on the shelf for a couple of years, when it was opportunistically released as a single just as Manson and his acolytes went on trial for murder.

Axl Rose discovered the track on the 1970 album *Lie: The Love And Terror Cult*, and figured Manson's status as an American anti-hero chimed with his band's. The decision to cover it as an uncredited bonus track on *The Spaghetti Incident?* backfired – the outrage that greeted it prompted the band to donate performance royalties to an environmental charity. But it was too little too late – an album that was conceived with the noblest of intentions ended on a sour note. ❹

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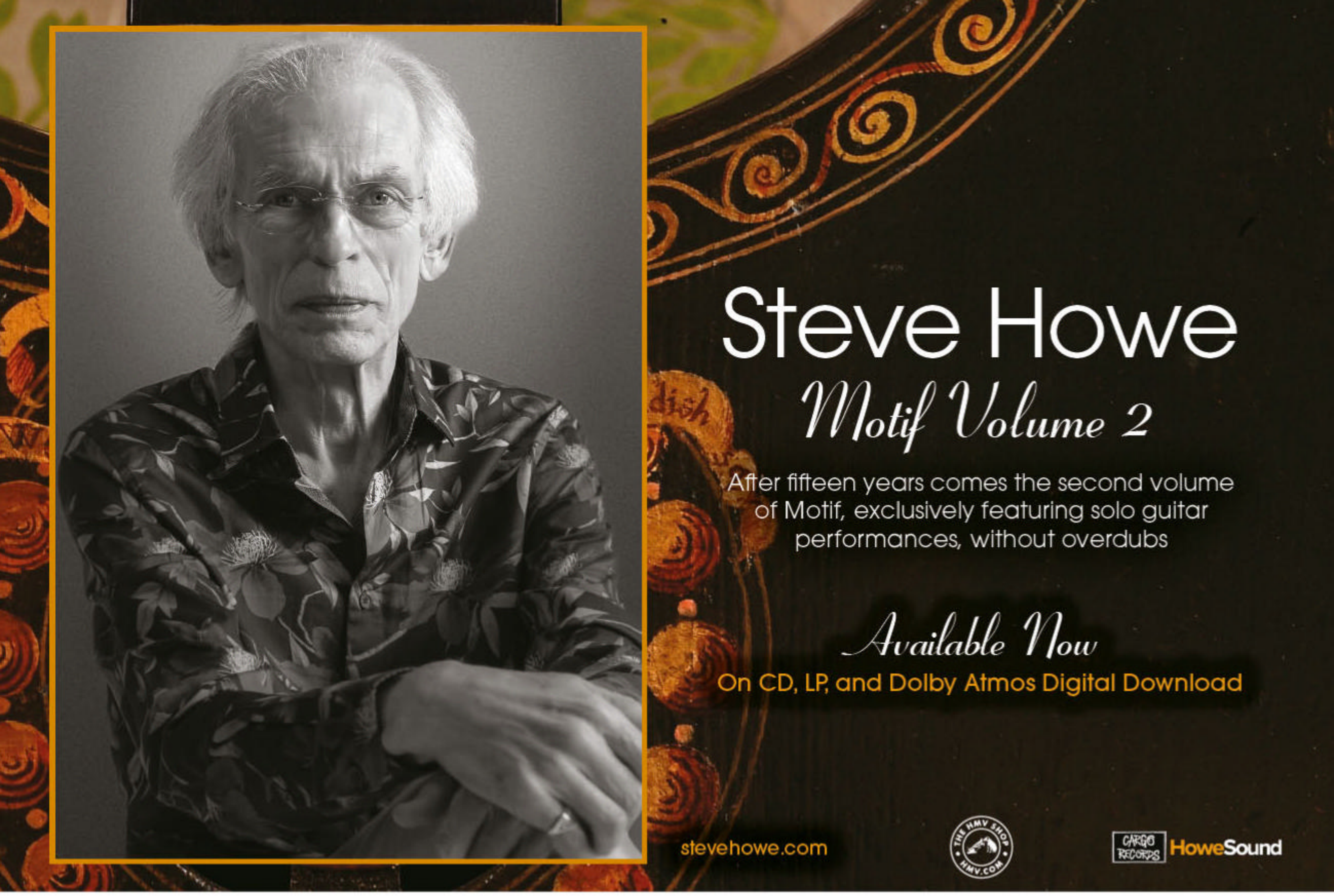
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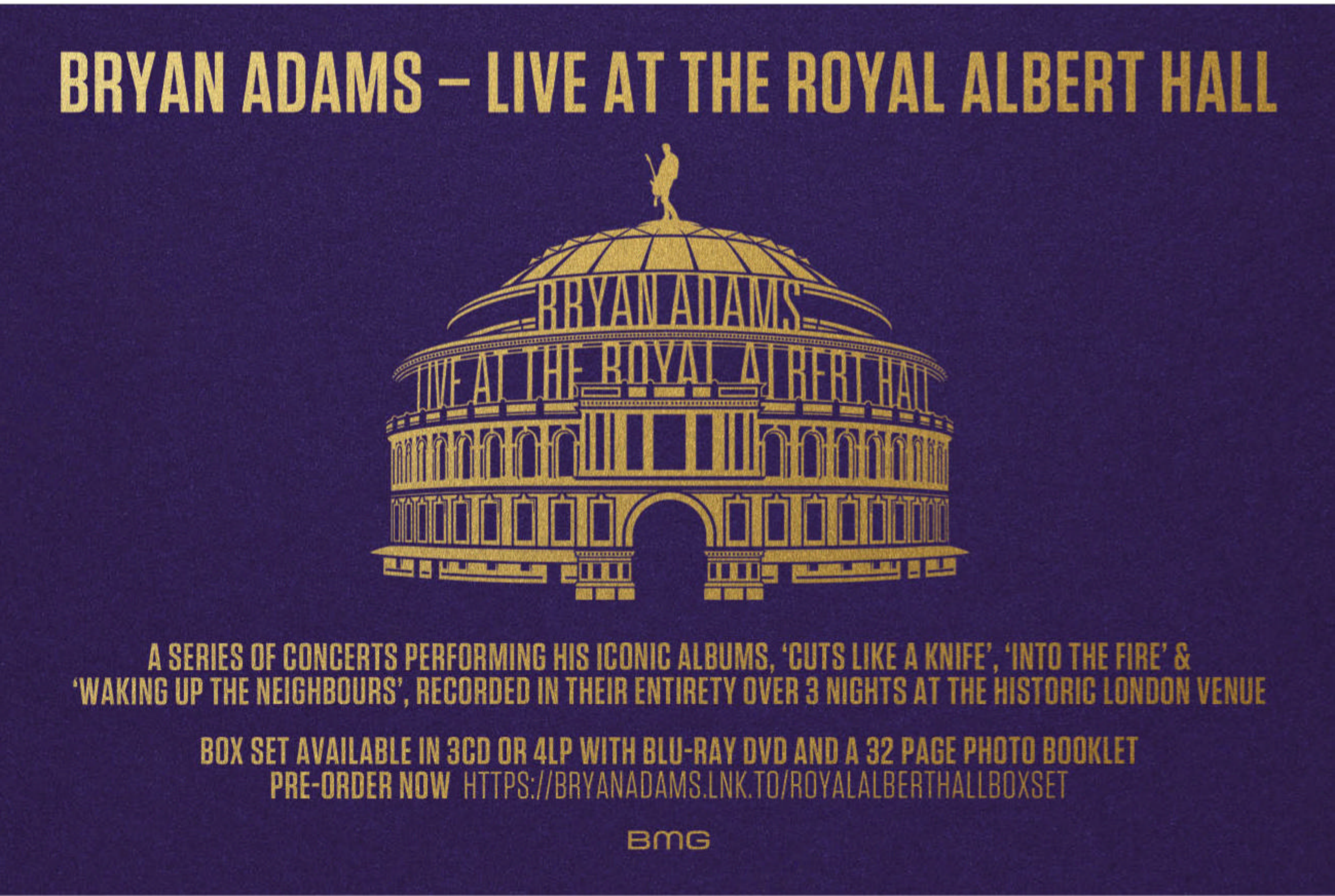
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EVER MEET LEMMY?

He was so nervous about playing with ***Bruce Springsteen*** *that he thought he was going to throw up; there was "something otherworldly" about* ***Mark Lanegan****; meeting* ***Tom Morello*** *put him in a head spin;* ***Jon Bon Jovi*** *is "a real-life rock star, in the very best way"... He is The Gaslight Anthem's* ***Brian Fallon****, and these are his stories.*

Words: **Dave Everley**

When The Gaslight Anthem's Brian Fallon started out, he never expected to be rubbing shoulders with the great and the good of rock'n'roll. "I'm just a punk-rock kid from New Jersey," says the singer, whose band recently reunited and are due to release their first album in nine years, *History Books*. "I just thought we'd put out some music and hit the clubs."

Except it didn't quite pan out like that. Fallon never met Lemmy, but he has sung on stage with Bruce Springsteen at Glastonbury, got life tips from Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, and been scared to death by Mark Lanegan.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

I grew up listening to him. I remember being a really young kid and hearing *Born In The USA* on MTV at my friend's house, and singing it over and over in the playground at school the next day. The first time I met him was really quick at a benefit show in Redbank, New Jersey – it was just a real quick "Hi" and a handshake, and that was it. Even then I lost my mind. I was freaking out inside.

What happened after was that one of his sons got into The Gaslight Anthem, and said: "Dad, you gotta hear this. It's like your music but punk." And I guess Bruce liked, and reached out when we both played Glastonbury [in 2009]. I say 'reached out', it's a ridiculous story. We're in our trailer at Glastonbury, like five minutes before we're due to go on stage, and suddenly all these police cars pull up. I'm like: 'Okay, I guess we're going to jail." So I go outside, and see Bruce Springsteen walking towards me in his sunglasses, and he goes: [gruffly] "Hey, can I play your song with you?" So literally five minutes later we're on stage doing *The '59 Sound* with Bruce Springsteen in this tent at Glastonbury. And it got even crazier that night, because I went out and sang a song [*No Surrender*] with him during his headlining set in front of ninety thousand people. Beforehand, I was, like: "I'm gonna throw up", I was so nervous.'

I've gotten to know him pretty well. He's like: "I've got all this life wisdom, and if you want some of it, you can ask me and I will tell you things." With the new Gaslight record [*History Books*], he said: "Why don't you write us a duet to sing?" And I basically sat there for months, going: "I cannot do this, I cannot write a duet for Bruce Springsteen." But then I realised: "I'm not gonna do that, I'm gonna write a Gaslight Anthem record and not worry about which one is for Bruce." When it came to picking a song, it's, like: "It's that one, it's gotta be *History Books*." We all knew it.

EDDIE VEDDER

The 'big three' to me are Bruce Springsteen, Joe Strummer and Eddie Vedder. I met Eddie at a festival through a friendship with the photographer Danny Clinch. We'd been covering [early Pearl Jam deep cut] *State Of Love And Trust*, and Danny said: "Eddie knows you guys cover it, he might show up." So I'm standing there on stage singing it, and I look over and there he is. And he looks back at me and he's like: "Hey!" and comes on. None of these people are subtle. They don't send a text or call, they're like Batman, they just show up.

Hanging out with him, he's a really thoughtful guy. His life is similar to mine – family things, growing up not knowing our dads. He gave me a letter, just encouraging us and saying the band is cool. On the second page he said: "I know the lyrics to *State Of Love And Trust* are kind of hard to understand, so I wanna make sure you've got 'em all," and he wrote them all out.

TOM MORELLO

Tim McIlrath from [political American punk band] Rise Against organised this benefit show maybe ten years ago. Tim is friends with Tom Morello and Wayne Kramer from the MC5, and he'd orchestrated this cover of [Springsteen's] *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*. He'd kindly included me on it cos we were the main support band on the tour. I'm standing there looking at his pedals, thinking: "What gear does he use to get those amazing sounds?" and he goes: "Oh, I just bought this yesterday, it's nothing special, it's just a piece of crap I use. It's not about what you got, it's about how you play." So I go: "Do the thing." He starts doing all the [makes Morello-esque squealing/siren-like guitar noise], and I'm losing my mind, because all I can see in my head is me at twelve years old, ready to smash the world. For me it was like standing next to Jimmy Page or Angus Young.

JON BON JOVI

It's like with Bruce, Jon decides he wants a friendship with you. I get this call from him out of nowhere. He's putting this little group of friends together – he decided that him, John Rzeznik from the Goo Goo Dolls and me are gonna be friends. So we all started hanging out together once in a while. It's bizarrely normal – these are guys you can imagine going to a basketball game with, they're that kind of guy. But every so often, I'll be with Jon and I'll suddenly think: "Woah, this is Jon Bon Jovi!"

Jon's got a quietness and confidence to him that's real strong. ▷

CASEY MCALLISTER/PRESS

"For me, [standing next to Tom Morello] was like standing next to Jimmy Page or Angus Young."

It's almost palpable – you can touch it. He's like a great athlete – he's not walking down the hallway on to the pitch high-fiving everybody, "Yeah, we're the best, we're gonna go rock 'em." It's more like: "I'm going to go out there and do the thing I was born to do." For me, he's a real-life rock star, in the very best way.

GREG DULLI

I would talk in interviews a lot about how much I love the Afghan Whigs. We had mutual friends, and they'd say: "Greg's a fan of your band." We ended up going on tour with Soundgarden and the Afghan Whigs, and Greg I got to be pretty close. I couldn't believe how friendly he was – he's a guy who's always smiling.

One night, we were taking this long, dark walk together through this festival, and he goes: "You want to go and meet Mark Lanegan?" Cos they were friends. He takes me down this dark path, and suddenly Lanegan just appears out of nowhere, wreathed in smoke, kind of like the devil. He was this big, huge guy with tattoos of stars on his hands. I have never seen a person speak less. When he said hello, I'm not sure he was even looking at me. I stood there and watched him and Greg talking. Afterwards, I go: "Does he not like me?" And Greg goes: "No, he's like that with anybody." There was something otherworldly about him.

"The first time I met Bruce it was just a real quick 'Hi' and a handshake, and that was it. Even then I lost my mind. I was freaking out inside."

JESSE MALIN

Jesse Malin and I met because The Gaslight Anthem put a couple of records out on [punk label] SideOneDummy, and one the label's owners, Joe Sib, knew I was a big fan of Jesse's old band and his solo stuff. He gave Jesse some of my stuff, and he was like: "This is cool, it's rock'n'roll but punk rock too. Why don't you put us on the phone."

So I was standing outside a comic-book store in Boston just before we were playing a show, when Jesse called me. We'd never met or spoken before, but we just hit it off. He told me he loved how I was referencing other songs and musicians in my songs, and he said: "Where do you get that?" I said: "Dude, I got it from hip-hop. It was all about the history and community. A Tribe Called Quest would mention Michael Jackson or whoever." We've become really good friends. He was at my wedding, he knows my kids, I went to visit him in the hospital [Malin suffered a spinal stroke in 2023]. He still talks about the name-checking thing: "Man, I never have thought about that."

IAN MACKAYE (MINOR THREAT/FUGAZI)

When I was a kid I loved Minor Threat. They were one of the first bands I really got into. Then when we were recording [The Gaslight Anthem's third album] *American Slang* at the Magic Shop studio in New York, we look downstairs and see Ian MacKaye in this small room. "That's Ian MaKaye! What's he doing here, in that little room?" So we go down there one at a time and sit and listen to all these Dischord records he was remastering. He's hanging out all day, and people like Adam Yauch from the Beastie Boys and [former *Saturday Night Live*/*Portlandia*] actor Fred Armisen are dropping by, just this parade of famous New Yorkers. I said: "I know this is cheesy, but my best friend is the biggest fan of you. Can I take a photo and send it to him?" And he stops eating and goes: "Of course, let's do it!"

Pinch-me moment: Brian Fallon performing with Bruce Springsteen.

JAKOB DYLAN (THE WALLFLOWERS)

Jakob is very, very cool, and he's one of the best-looking people I have ever seen in my life. He walks into the room and it's like Kate Moss has just walked in – everyone is like: "Wow, that person is beautiful." I got to know him through Joe Sib too, and Jesse Malin. He's so funny, but also really irreverent and punk rock. I was shocked at how much he knew about punk rock. I'm like: "Your dad's Bob Dylan, this giant famous person, how can you have any experience with punk rock?" But he knows all about that stuff. Even though his dad is who he is, Jakob had to do everything on his own. If one of my kids said: "I need a Marshall stack to go play," I'd be: "Okay, here you go." But he said his dad wanted him to go and do it on his own so he could say he'd done it on his own, which I think was awesome.

DAVE GROHL

Dave Grohl is one of those guys who's always hanging out. He'll always show up in a good mood. One time we were at a festival, and I said to him: "You gotta produce a Gaslight record." He thought about it for a minute, then he comes back to me and says: "Here's what I think: what am I gonna say? I'm a fan of your band, you're gonna play me a song and I'm gonna go: 'Sounds awesome!' And then I've got nothing left to give you. I can't critique your band, because I'm a fan, and that's why I wouldn't be a good producer." I thought: "Damn, that's disappointing but awesome at the same time."

History Books is out now via Rich Mahogany Recordings/ Thirty Tigers. The Gaslight Anthem tour the UK in March.

GETTY

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THE ESSENTIAL NEW ROCK TRACKS YOU NEED TO HEAR THIS MONTH AND THE BANDS TO HAVE ON YOUR RADAR

RUJO CRUCE/PRESS

It's our last Hot List of 2023, and what a year it's been for new music. Across the board we've seen quality stuff, with rising stars and up-and-coming groups often giving music's veteran big cheeses a serious run for their money – as they should do. Seldom has the rock landscape been so fruitful, for those inclined to listen.

As we start to reflect on the sounds that have lingered on our playlists since January, we come bearing one last selection of box-fresh tunes from rock'n'roll's rich spectrum. There's AC/DC-esque riffage, hooky 90s energy, British southern rock, gorgeous pop-rock balladry, glam synths with a dystopian bent, and (in one case) sexy nuns with guitars. That's right, folks, nuns with guitars – and they're good! Don't say we don't give you variety here at CR.

See you for more in 2024, and in the meantime keep checking out the latest new tracks over at classicrockmagazine.com

Dogma *The Forbidden Zone*

Here's something a bit different. Mysterious foursome Dogma practise the kind of subversive campery and metallic rock that Alice Cooper, Ghost and In This Moment fans will go mad for, epitomised by ultra-riffy, synth-laced single *The Forbidden Zone*. Part rock band, part corpse-painted cult, they "cast aside the chains of modesty, conjuring a tempest of sensuality that demands unwavering attention and passionate participation". And they dress up as sexy nuns.
officialdogma.com

The Lazys
Rattle Them Bones

Cut from the same hairy hellraiser cloth as Airbourne, Monster Truck and others that go well with a few cold beers, these Aussies' comeback single is raw, riff-tastic and right in your face from the first beat. Think Bon-era AC/DC, with a trucker beard. "*Rattle Them Bones* embodies our band's trials, tribulations, and resurrection through the pandemic and its aftershock," singer Leon Harrison says. "It was spawned out of frustration during the pandemic, while navigating our way back to what we do best, rockin the stage!"
thelazysband.com

Thomas Walsh *A Good Day For Me*

Teamed up with Divine Comedy mainman Neil Hannon (the two of them have also collaborated as cricket-themed – how's that for niche? – pop concept outfit the Duckworth Lewis Method), Ireland's best-kept secret Thomas Walsh is on sparkling form on this gauzy, sun-kissed pocketful of West Coast harmonies and gorgeous McCartney-meets-ELO melody. Sublime songwriting and storytelling. The musical equivalent of a bright autumn day (conveniently enough, as Daylight Saving Time descends). If you like the sound of that, then Walsh's new solo album *The Rest Is History* is a must-listen.
facebook.com/thomaswalshsongwriter

Rose Tiger *Meet Me At The Cemetery*

Smooth, sleek and more than a bit funky, this new single from the Franco-Anglo-Hispanic trio mixes slinky 80s synth-pop and 00s alt.rock atmosphere, with a 70s glam lipstick smear. The audio equivalent of a blue Slush Puppie in a velvet-lined VIP booth, set in some kind of dark, mysterious future. Spearheading the campaign for their debut album – a dystopian conceptual epic called *The End Forever* – it has an eye-grabbing animated video that made us imagine Gorillaz infiltrating *Blade Runner*, via the Death Star Canteen… It's probably best if you hop onto YouTube and see for yourself, but it's a very cool, enveloping world they've painted here.
facebook.com/rosetigermusic

ROSE TIGER: LUCAS DONAUD/PRESS

REWS

Breathe Into Me

Fresh from supporting Black Stone Cherry, Northern Irish singer/guitarist Shauna Tohill (aka REWS) is back with a new album, *Meridians*, from which this soaring, fighting highlight is taken. Full of 90s grit and grungy sugar, its sweetness is grounded by a stompiness that feels more recent – if Alanis Morisssette teamed up with Royal Blood, you could imagine them coming up with something like *Breathe Into Me*. Tackling themes of "resilience, love, and the human spirit's ability to triumph over adversity", the album as a whole is made of similarly inviting, 90s-meets-00s chops, tunes and textures. Well worth a listen.

rewsmusic.com

The Blue Lena

The Wrong Side Of Might

Built around vocalist Peter Yeomans and guitarist Nick Singleton (formerly of High Treason and Tattooed Love Boys), The Blue Lena make southern rock with a soulful twist. If Blackberry Smoke were fronted by Paul Rodgers, they might have made a noise like this British seven-piece. There's also a blue-collar element to their sound. As the band put it: "Imagine if Bruce Springsteen was British and had written those infectious songs of life, love and loss, but in small town England."

thebluelena.co.uk

REWS: SHONA CUTT/PRESS

Florence Black
Look Up

Welsh hard rockers Florence Black have built up a generous stash of bruising riffs and woozy, grungy distortion over the past few years. It's won them support slots with Stone Sour, Steel Panther, Reef and more – although, if we're completely honest, a killer cover of Budgie's *Breadfan* was probably the most memorable tune in their set. Now they've nailed that essential next step: a colossal anthem that's all theirs and feels like a proper hit, with the sort of bold, moreish melody that drives the track without hiding behind layers of guitars. More like this and they'll be laughing.
florenceblack.uk

Low Cut Connie *Whips And Chains*

Adam Weiner and friends launch a ferociously groovy attack on Trump and present-day neo-fascism with *Whips And Chains*. A fast and furious garage-blues boogie, hot off the Philadelphia-based/New Jersey-born auteur's new album *Art Dealers*, it marries the toe-tapping, piano-pounding factor of Jerry Lee Lewis's *Great Balls Of Fire* with layers of swaggering, juicy soul and fuzzed-up guitars. It's everything we love about Weiner and his gender-fluid storytelling powers, in three eviscerating, carnal minutes. Sweaty bar music of the best kind.
lowcutconnie.com

LOW CUT CONNIE: SHERVIN LAINEZ/PRESS; FLORENCE BLACK: © BRADLEY SCOTT/PRESS

And keep an ear out for... The Virginmarys

Macclesfield duo The Virginmarys have had an interesting ride over the past 10 years, breaking out in 2013 with blinding opening statement *King Of Conflict*, and navigating the ups and downs of the industry and 21st-century life since then, all the while sticking to their guns artistically and making urgent rock music with a punk slant.

Now a bullshit-free duo, they conjure the heavy, incendiary feeling of their debut on mega-hooky single *Where Are You Now?* (their first new release of 2023). Boasting a beefy yet atmospheric production, it starts off softly but quickly gathers pace and heft in the form of gnarly, driving guitars, thunderous beats and skin-shivering chorus vocals, frontman Ally Dickaty nailing one of his most powerful performances yet. It's the kind of tension-building explosiveness they do so well, at its best.

As we went to press they were into a successful support run with Sisters Of Mercy, and preparing to start work on their next album. Watch out for more in the new year.
thevirginmarys.com

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Ingredients:

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Edited By Ian Fortnam
ian.fortnam@futurenet.com

p82

Nirvana

How much have added extras made arguably their greatest album even greater?

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The Hard Stuff Albums

BEN COPE/PRESS

The Struts

Pretty Vicious BIG MACHINE

Derby's ambitious classic rock crew aim for the stars with album number four.

If the company you keep was a measure of success, then The Struts would be on an unstoppable trajectory to the stars. Dave Grohl is an admirer and very vocal supporter. They've collaborated with everyone from Kesha to Tom Morello, Def Leppard to Paris Jackson – a cross generational, cross-genre crew of disparate characters if ever there was one. They've supported the Rolling Stones and Guns N' Roses, and frontman Luke Spiller sang with Queen at the Taylor Hawkins tribute concerts in LA and London. Yet despite all this and also a reputation for spectacular live shows, their profile outside the rock-scene bubble has never quite matched their promise.

Pretty Vicious could be the album to change all that. Opener *Too Good At Raising Hell* straddles the line between pop and rock, cherry-picking the best things about both. Epidemically catchy, fearlessly camp and glam, air-punch anthemic and just the right level of daft, it would sit as comfortably alongside the 80s Sunset Strip big players as it would alongside Robbie Williams (another past collaborator) at the height of his Vegas-shagging fame.

Brash, then, but that's not to say it entirely lacks nuance. The title track is clearly inspired by Chris Isaak's *Wicked Game*, giving it a shot of adrenaline but retaining its sense of romantic fear and betrayal, all set to a driving classic-rock beat that harks back to the days when MTV played actual music videos. *Bad Decisions* is a moment of genuine, heartfelt, emotional remorse from the sharp end of the rock'n'roll lifestyle. *Rockstar*, meanwhile, pays gonzo tribute to Queen in Spiller's yelps and a pile of layered vocal harmonies. None of it attempts to reinvent the wheel, rather it's a glitter-dusted love letter to the greats that came before them.

The Struts are unapologetic in striving for the big time. *Pretty Vicious* is a pouting, theatrical stab at fame and all the fabulous opportunities it affords. It's music harks back to the days when rock'n'roll ruled the world and made its protagonists gods, at least for the hour they spent on stage. And in a world of beige, it's a splash of kaleidoscopic colour, with absolutely zero allowances for the notion of being cool. This is showing off on a grand scale, and why not?

Whether the world at large falls for their charms remains to be seen – they certainly stick out like a peacock in a flock of chickens on today's radio landscape – but there's no doubt that they've given it their all this time around.

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Emma Johnston

Dolly Parton

Rockstar BUTTERFLY/BIG MACHINE

Country queen rocks out with McCartney, Halford, Tyler, Jett and a cast of thousands.

Thundering over the horizon like a stampeding herd of glittery elephants, Dolly Parton's forty-ninth studio album is a 30-track sprawl of guitar-revving soft-rock originals, classic cover versions and superstar duets. It is also the 77-year-old Queen Of Country's most deranged project yet, a towering wedding cake of syrupy excess and Elvis-in-Vegas naffness. Seven decades of rock and pop history are mulched together here, from a huge treacle-drenched *Let It Be* featuring Paul and Ringo, to hen-party karaoke versions of *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction, Stairway To Heaven, Purple Rain, We Are The Champions, Free Bird* and more.

Applying normal critical standards here seems futile, but it is worth noting that Parton's tremulous, twangy voice retains its piercing emotional power even at maximum cheese levels. There are some unexpectedly lovely moments too, such as the Parton-penned power ballad *My Blue Tears* featuring Simon Le Bon's luminous harmonising.

Rockstar is not unprecedented – Parton previously covered Dylan and Bon Jovi, as well as duetting with Rod Stewart, Neil Young and others. But what other living icon could unite Joan Jett, Sting, Rob Halford, Lizzo, Nikki Sixx, Steven Tyler, Debbie Harry, Stevie Nicks, Elton John and more across a single album like this? Amazingly, Dolly even managed to dodge the obligatory Dave Grohl cameo.

A monumentally hideous, yet strangely glorious album. Some might say it goes up to 11…

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Stephen Dalton

Dokken

Heaven Comes Down SILVER LINING

Still rokken' after all these years.

Back in the 80s, when big-haired rock bands were selling millions of records, the most dysfunctional of them all was Dokken; the animosity between singer Don Dokken and guitarist George Lynch ran deep. Now, in an echo of that old rivalry, there are simultaneous releases from Don's modern version of Dokken and George's group Lynch Mob (reviewed on p77).

The title of the new Dokken album is a nod to their crunchy 1984 track *When Heaven Comes Down*, and the band's classic signature sound is upfront in songs such as *Fugitive* and *Just Like A Rose*, with Don's voice full of character, and guitarist Jon Levin nailing melodic riffs and shredding leads in a remarkably close approximation of Lynch.

The surprise comes with the album's closer, *Santa Fe*, a bittersweet acoustic track in which the grizzled Sunset Strip survivor turns existentialist. He's sung a lot of great songs, but none as meaningful as this one.

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Paul Elliott

The Cadillac Three

The Years Go Fast BIG MACHINE

Album number six finds TC3 sounding all-growed up.

The Cadillac Three now have clear water between themselves and their first two albums (2012's *Tennessee Mojo* and 2016's *Bury Me In My Boots*). They began to cut themselves adrift from the hard-drinkin', southern-rockin' template on 2017's *Legacy*, then, following two albums released in 2020, took a break. The title chosen for their return suggests they've reappraised how they want to sound.

Double Wide Grave, Comin' Down For You and *Hillbilly* are familiarly framed rockers in their 'country fuzz' style, but elsewhere things have changed. *Young And Hungry* has an almost new-wave feel, *The Worst* has them dabbling with synthesised percussion, and the ballad *Love Like War* exhibits shades of Tears For Fears. Jaren Johnston's accented voice maintains contact with their older work, but these lyrics speak more about loss and heartache than about hellraising. Clearly, he hasn't written 10 country number ones for others by being a one-trick pony.

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Neil Jeffries

Foghat

Sonic Mojo FOGHAT

Roger Earl-led line-up get back to the blues.

Once upon a time in America, Foghat were massive, selling millions of records, while never quite vexing the charts in their

native UK. They were a sort of posher Grank Funk Railroad, a blues-boom ZZ Top, and with songs like *Slow Ride* and *Eight Days On The Road* they had a string of heavy hits.

Perhaps to their own surprise, Foghat are still going, 50 years after they first formed. Led by drummer Roger Earl, with material written by Kim Simmonds of fellow blues rockers Savoy Brown, the 2023 Foghat continue to make music that could have appeared any time between 1971 and now with rockers like *Black Days Blue Nights* and the John Lee Hooker-esque *Drivin' On*. There's even some novelty with the Hank Williams tribute *I Wish I'd Been There*.

David Quantick

HeKz

Terra Nova SELF-RELEASED

Ambitious proggers break new ground.

Something of a fresh start for the band, hence the title, *Terra Nova* is the first album from the new line-up put together by Matt Young (bass/keyboards/vocals) following a split in 2020.

Now, with a singular artistic vision at the helm, album number four is a monumental double about ambition and self-realisation, and arguably their most satisfyingly crafted record to date, combining old-school prog with the heft of modern metal. Relatively short tracks like *Horizons*, *Lifeline* and *Too Far Gone* are typically intricate, but, true to the album's themes, the 25-minute *The Silent Man* is where the action lies – tons of light and shade, and instrumental twists galore.

A complex album that will keep on giving.

Essi Berelian

Various

Heavenly Cream: An Acoustic Tribute To Cream QUARTO VALLEY

Thankfully not whipped.

Once bitten, twice shy: when you've heard a classic song by one of your favourite bands being bloodied and bruised (e.g. Lulu's GBH attack of *Sunshine Of Your Love*), understandably you approach this album with some trepidation. Thankfully these acoustic (not quite) covers of Cream songs and some famously covered by Cream (e.g. *Crossroads*, *Spoonful*) by various permutations from a cast including Joe Bonamassa, Bernie Marsden, Neil Murray, Pete Brown, Paul Rodgers, Deborah Bonham and Ginger Baker (oh yes) mostly stand up well on their own, and are performed empathetically.

Among the best are a gritty *Crossroads* growled by Bernie Marsden, with Ginger on drums; Jack Bruce/Pete Brown's exquisite (post-Cream) *Theme From An Imaginary Western*, done wonderfully, with tender vocals from Brown; a breezy and faintly samba-feel *I Feel Free* sung with aplomb by Deborah Bonham. While some are less successful than others, at least there are no clunkers – and with a project of this type, that's rare.

Paul Henderson

Doro

Conqueress – Forever Strong And Proud NUCLEAR BLAST

Conquer season.

Peters And Lee. Renée And Renato. David Van Day and Thereza Bazar. If you're a sucker for a bit of cheesy male-female duettin' action, you're gonna love it when veteran German metal queen Doro Pesch teams up with (wait for it) Judas Priest's Rob Halford on (drum roll) the Bonnie Tyler/Jim Steinman chestnut *Total Eclipse Of The Heart*. We kid you not. It's right here on track 15, and it's the guiltiest of guilty pleasures. A little bit Warlock, a little bit Walsall, a killer combination. (FYI: also included here is a terrific Doro/Rob version of Priest's *Living After Midnight*.)

So is the rest of the album a powder keg, and does it give off sparks? You betcha. Doro knows her heavy-metal zwiebeln – and then some. From lumbering NDH-style opener *Children Of The Dawn*, via the revved-up-and-rampant *Lean Mean Rock Machine*, to giant ballad *Fels In der Brandung*, the entire caboodle brims with power, pride and passion.

Geoff Barton

Spiritual Cramp

Spiritual Cramp BLUE GRAPE MUSIC

San Francisco punks channel the classics.

Seemingly content to keep on releasing an endless stream of EPs and singles since their inception in 2016, San Francisco punks Spiritual Cramp have finally got round to making their debut album – which, unsurprisingly, plays like a collection of singles.

With the tight and propulsive bass and drums in irresistible lockstep with the spiky, angular riffing, the effect is like listening to a turbo-charged Gang Of Four, with splashes of dub and touches of the Clash and Talking Heads. The opening trio of *Blowback*, *Slick Rick* and *Talkin' On The Internet* is virtually bulletproof, and the punchy hooks just keep on coming – *City On Fire*, *Clashing At The Party*, *Catch A Hot 1* are all insanely catchy and well-paced, with *Herbert's On Holiday* a touching punk-rock love song.

An urgent half-hour adrenaline surge that will lodge itself in your brain after just one listen. Impressive.

Essi Berelian

The Bites

Squeeze EARACHE

'Hollywood's new bad boys' party like it's 1989.

A band vowing to make 'party rock'n'roll' can struggle to get us warmed up at first. Live, of course, it all makes sweaty sense, but on first encounter on record it can resemble someone trying to start a conga in a coffee shop.

LA quintet The Biters won't be discouraged, though, judging by the swaggering ebullience of frontman Jordan Tyler, already TikTok-famous for his classic-rock covers. In their eagerness to channel Cathouse-style vibes, some tracks are a little too Crüe for school – leery glam-metal like *Heather Leather* ('*She wants to love me, I'm gonna let her*') needs to source a crowd to bring it to life. But when there's an edge of early noughties garage like The Vines and The Hives, it injects the title track and bonus track *Dirty City* with a welcome injection of non-generic adrenaline, and The Bites begin to really draw blood.

Johnny Sharp

ROUND-UP: SLEAZE

By Sleazegrinder

Pussy Gillette: a crazy wet dream for fans of trashy rock'n'roll.

Pussy Gillette

Permanent Trash SELF-RELEASED

Second album from these Austin street-rockers, and if they are not the most famous band in this entire magazine by the time you're reading this, then there is very little hope we'll make it to 2024 in one piece.

Led by bass/vocalist Masani Negloria, a switchblade-wielding mash-up of Wendy O Williams and Betty Davis (or Bette Davis, take your pick), this power trio are like some kinda crazy wet dream for fans of trashy rock'n'roll. It's now, it's '77, it's in the basement and the arena at the same time. Dig the throbbing bass and Dead Boys-y razor riffs of opener *So Fucked*, the rabble-rousing ode to car theft *Hot Wire*, and the gloriously raunchy title track that rips off the Ramones in the best way possible. Masoni's atonal delivery is so perfectly hostile you can almost feel her hot breath. There is no way you can listen to this record and not immediately become a fan of their sleazy sonic rendezvous. A masterpiece of snot and spit.

Almighty Zeros

Almighty Zeros KLOPPSTOCK RECORDS

Three-man wrecking crew from the splendorous North East of England. Lemme tell you, if Bigfoot could get his fat fingers around a guitar, he'd fit right in with these hairy beasts. Bash-'em-up rock'n'roll, influenced chiefly by Motörhead and (I'm guessing) Oliver Reed's propensity for alcohol consumption and bar-brawling.

Bloody Dice

Bloody Dice SELF-RELEASED

Danish by geography, but with well-seasoned members from parts all over, Bloody Dice are a potent hard rock band with a sound big enough to fill a soccer (or football? I'm American) stadium. With soaring vocals, crunching guitars and a walloping rhythm section, *Bloody Dice* is equal parts GN'R and AC/DC, with just a dash of Pretty Maids. Tasty.

Slicer

Stalking The Night SELF-RELEASED

Opener *Death Rock N' Roll* tells you all you need to know about these Romanian hellraisers. It's devil-worshipping speed-rock of the highest calibre and velocity; catchy but brutal jammers that bring to mind The Hookers, Zeke, Speedealer and The Dwarves, only meaner and uglier, if you can imagine such a thing.

The Weeping Wounds

Doo Wop Thou Will SELF-RELEASED

You could argue that the songs here really are doo woppers, albeit mangled into twisted bursts of noise and corrosive guitar riffs. Worth it for the amazing cover of *Mambo No 5* alone, which they punch into something The Only Ones might do if they favoured walls of feedback to power-pop. Really.

THE HARD STUFF ALBUMS

The Gaslight Anthem

History Books RICH MAHOGANY/THIRTY TIGERS

Soul-searching, redemptive and worthy return for the New Jersey rockers.

When Bruce Springsteens says: "Rock", The Gaslight Anthem – more than most heartland bands – say: "How hard?" When Gaslight singer Brian Fallon was pondering reuniting the band after an eight-year hiatus and four impressive solo albums, he turned to Springsteen – a friend and mentor as much as an obvious influence these days – for guidance.

"Write songs" was the crux of The Boss's advice, and one of the first Fallon wrote was the title track of this belated sixth Gaslight Anthem album, a dynamic drive-time rocker bound, as ever, for glory, and featuring Springsteen as a grizzled voice of wisdom drawing out the song's broken, despondent heart: '*One day goes by, I try to live till the next one…*'

They'll doubtless be tired of the comparison, but *History Books* finds The Gaslight Anthem echoing Springsteen's more recent, reflective and mature albums too. Bare-chested canyon rock is present and correct, but so too is much introspection, melancholia, hurt and hope. For all its galloping anthemic bluster, opener *Spider Bites* is racked with anxiety and pessimism: '*We circle round the sun till the day that we won't,*' Fallon cries. Ponderous rocker *Autumn* details his eternal internal battles with mental health ('*There's too much traffic in my head, babe… all my feelings always seem so out to get me*'). *Empires*, a classic blue-collar lament set to beats reverberating from the walls of Ultravox's *Vienna*, finds him – or his weary working-man protagonist – facing down judgement day having learned '*there's an evil in the heart of this world, and much more in the heart of a man*'.

By the end of the album, Fallon is still fundamentally tortured: '*Only I can know how thin the walls have grown inside of me, in the dark on my own,*' he attests on oceanic closer *A Lifetime Of Preludes*, a long, dark night spent dreaming of lost love.

Along the way, though, *History Books* is bathed in occasional shards of redemptive light. *Positive Charge* arrives as a pounding, powerful blast of self-help therapy inspired by Fallon's experiences with psychoanalysis, that sets out to rise above his traumas: '*I need a spark, I need a positive charge, plug it into my veins, make me love this life again.*' For a while, the spark fires him up. Sophisticated, piano-brushed ballad *Michigan, 1975* drifts gorgeously towards a subtle revelation– '*love doesn't scare me any more*' – and the powerhouse punk *Little Fires* blazes through the album's core with all the excitement, defiance and pride of a pivotal modern heartland rock band utterly revived.

Mark Beaumont

Duran Duran

Danse Macabre BMG

The Durannies attempt to own Halloween with a graveyard glitterball of an album.

Halloween has a rich soundtrack – *Thriller, Monster Mash*, the theme from *The Lost Boys*, all of goth… – but no definitive act; no slasher Slade, no murderous Mariah Carey, barely even a diabolic Michael Bublé.

Enter Duran Duran, inspired by a Halloween live set last year to record this full album of ghoulish pop featuring three new tracks, a host of crypt-lurking covers, and two old Duran songs strapped into blood-smattered hockey masks.

The new tunes are pleasingly creepy: *Black Moonlight*, a new collaboration with Nile Rodgers, boasts an authentic 80s horror-funk feel, *Confession In The Afterlife* is suitably wraithlike, and the title track essentially invents gothip-hop. Similarly, the reworked numbers – *Nightboat* and *Secret Oktober 31st* – are vampiric synth-pop highlighting the thin divide between new-romanticism and early electro-goth.

But apart from a Depeche-like *Supernature* and a dramatic, psychosis-riddled take on Talking Heads' *Psycho Killer*, the covers are often as cheesy as a Halloween BOO-ffet. There are more lover man than Candyman vibes to *Love Voudou*, DD's disco camp obliterates the menace of Billie Eilish's *Bury A Friend* and the Stones' *Paint It, Black*, and The Specials' *Ghost Town* sounds less haunted urban desolation, more Scooby Doo investigating some spooky goings-on in Coventry clubland, 1983. Some nifty tricks – mashing their own *Lonely In Your Nightmare* into Rick James's *Super Freak*, for example – but not quite enough treat.

Mark Beaumont

Dhani Harrison

Innerstanding H.O.T./BMG

Second solo confection from Olivia's son.

While it's clear from Dhani Harrison's formative artistic development (completing father George's final, unfinished album *Brainwashed* alongside Jeff Lynne; a three-album stint as frontman/guitarist with Thenewno2; his pivotal electronica-laced *In//Parallel* solo debut of 2017) that he's determined to forge a reputation in spite of his Beatle genes rather than because of them, he really does bear an uncanny resemblance, both physically and sonically, to his iconic forebear.

Rather than simply embrace his dumb luck (by resignedly doing a Julian), Harrison has (partially) masked up. Previously donning horn rims and beard, he appears in silhouette on *Innerstanding*'s cover, complements timeless inherited melodic sensibilities and deft guitar skills with contemporary electronica, disguises a familiar vocal timbre with cosmetic effects, but ultimately you can't completely conceal talent. *Innerstanding* (with guest spots from Graham Coxon, Liela Moss and Merki), maintains *In//Parallel*'s intrinsic style and pan-genre forward momentum, a seamless, pop-literate/prog-friendly fusion positively peppered with an abundance of barbed hooks. Harrison has ultimately found a characteristic style that, while most certainly fab, is entirely his own.

Ian Fortnam

Jean-Michel Jarre

Oxymoreworks SONY

Starry but patchy remix collection from ageless Parisian electro knob twiddler.

The perennially boyish Peter Pan of Parisian synth-tronica has rebooted his career with panache over the past decade, releasing an impressive run of hi-tech headphones albums alongside starry collaborations with the likes of Pete Townshend, Primal Scream, Massive Attack, Laurie Anderson, Gary Numan and more. But the 75-year-old Jarre's latest collection feels like a lightweight stopgap exercise, a spin-off from his 2022 album *Oxymore* featuring remixes and joint reworkings by Brian Eno, Martin Gore, superstar DJ Armin van Buuren and others. However stellar the guest list, the results here often veer into faceless, tasteless, old-fashioned trance-techno banality. Eno's *Epica Extension* mix is a boringly restrained exercise in easy-listening electro, Van Buuren's *Epica Maxima* a solid but unremarkable big-room dancefloor knob throbber. Thankfully, less famous collaborators such as masked EDM pranksters Deathpact

CASEY McALLISTER/PRESS

prove more lively and irreverent, transforming *Brutalism Reprise* into a giddy gallop of acid-adjacent bleep and squelch.

Jarre's hunger to stay relevant is commendable, his quality control less so.

Stephen Dalton

Robin Trower feat. Sari Schorr

Joyful Sky PROVOGUE

Caution: filling can be hot.

It's odd how Robin Trower has for many years now mostly flown under the radar that pings guitar 'heroes'. A singularly stylish player, with a refreshingly economical delivery wrapped up in a range of sumptuous tones, he first put down a marker with a trio of 70s albums, of which the brilliant *Bridge Of Sighs* is the best of all his releases.

Fifty years later, Trower has not lost anything from that signature style and sound, and *Joyful Sky* is a bluesy album featuring some excellent songs as well as some fine, powerful and emotive performances from vocalist Sari Schorr. Right from the off, with slow, smouldering opener *Burn*, through the funk-blues of *The Distance* and *Change It* and the atmospheric, echo-drenched title track, Schorr weaves between Trower's hot-valve chords and hot-wire soloing (his playing on *The Circle Is Complete* is heart-stoppingly good), knowing when to wail and when to keep it sweet. But this is Trower's album, and throughout it's his wonderful playing that shapes it and rightfully dominates.

Paul Henderson

Helmet

Left EARMUSIC

NYC noise-rock icons get riffy and weird.

Disinclined to rush things, Helmet tend to reappear when their leader Page Hamilton is sufficiently pissed off to fire up the riff machine. *Left* is the New York band's ninth studio album, and it delivers a tense, spiky expansion of the more diverse sound that the band have pursued since re-forming in 2004.

It opens with the best song Hamilton has written in a decade or more: *Holiday* is Helmet at their strident, poisonous best, with giant riffs, insidious hooks and their frontman in spit-spraying mode. '*Asshat! Fuckwit!*' he barks. Alright, mate, chill out. The remaining nine tracks veer from vitriolic riff-ups like *NYC Tough Guy* and *Big Shot* to *Gun Fluf*'s gleeful complexities and the droning, bent-nail grooves of *Bombastic*. *Reprise* and *Dislocated* are psychedelic noise-rock par excellence, while *Tell Me Again* is a mournful acoustic gem. Their 1993 album *Meantime* remains the benchmark, but this is Helmet's best this century.

Dom Lawson

Phil Manzanera & Andy Mackay

AM PM BFD/THE ORCHARD

Roxy Music alumni search for something new.

Begun spontaneously during lockdown then completed after Roxy Music's reunion tour (with Paul Thompson joining in on drums), this gorgeous, guileful set of instrumentals is everything you'd expect yet somehow more than this. The guitarist and saxophonist find the sweet spot merging Roxy-adjacent moods and nimble experimentation, and each track is both instantly likeable and tenaciously rewarding.

Whether on the loping funk of *Blue Sky*, which carries something of the latent drama of the extended intro to Roxy's *Manifesto*, or the tingling flickers and flames of *Ambulante*, the pair exhibit matchless musical simpatico; if one of them is going off-piste, the other's manning the fort, and both prove you can run wild without tripping into self-indulgence.

It's never jazz; at heart it's too shrewd and centred to expect you to do all the work, and it crafts shapes which show their fertile creativity from appetising angles. Roxy fans will adore it, others should.

Chris Roberts

Sophie Lloyd

Imposter Syndrome AUTUMN

Next-gen guitar hero embraces the enormity of 80s rock.

Imposter Syndrome, guitarist Sophie Lloyd's debut album, is a love letter to the bravado and larger-than-life swagger of 80s rock. But rather than slapping on some spandex and digging up some fossils to replicate what came before, it sees the sometime YouTube sensation teaming up with a bevy of 21st-century rock singers, who add fresh vitality and vibrance to good old-fashioned rock'n'roll.

In turn, Lloyd offers an arena-sized stage for her guests to shine: Inglorious frontman Nathan James earns some redemptive credit from recent(ish) band-and-social-media drama on greased-up rocker *Do Or Die*, while Lzzy Hale is an undeniable force of nature on the towering title track. Not all tracks sizzle with the same potency – *Runaway*, featuring Michael Starr, feels like a rote celebration of tropes best left buried – but on the whole this album is a joyous and triumphant experience that shows Lloyd is more than ready for the spotlight.

Rich Hobson

King Herd

King Herd SELF-RELEASED

Majestic debut from UK heavy rockers.

Anyone who caught an earful of the three singles released by King Herd in 2022 must surely be waiting in keen anticipation for their debut album. *Medicine*, *Remedy* and *Halo* provide a pretty good idea of what to expect: slick, modern heavy rock, keenly engineered for maximum melodic impact.

Kicking off with *Halo* is a smart move, its huge chorus an instant ear worm, the kind most bands deliver only a couple of times per album, but King Herd's golden chorus hit rate is consistent across all 10 tracks. Following *Halo*, *Close To The End*, *Remedy*, *The Same* and *Somebody Else* combine tough, gritty riffing with soaring melodies and harmonies. Only *Save Me* and *Like It Used To Be* take the foot off the gas, and even then the sheer scale and drive of the songwriting still shines through. Immense from start to finish.

Essi Berelian

ROUND-UP: MELODIC ROCK

By Dave Ling

Steve Overland: one for fans of early FM.

Steve Overland

Six ESCAPE MUSIC

In 1990, the exit of co-founding guitarist Chris Overland (RIP) from FM saw the British quintet steer away from a pure-AOR blueprint by adding mild though distinguishable bluesier elements. For that reason, despite the consistency of FM's subsequent output, purists consider albums one and two – *Indiscreet* and *Tough It Out* – to be the band's definable high-water mark.

Outside of FM, and guided by specialist label Escape Music, lead vocalist Steve Overland continues to celebrate a lifelong heritage in soft rock. With guitars and keyboards from Work Of Art and W.E.T.'s Robert Säll, a veritable kingpin of the Scandi-rock scene, Overland reels back the years with solo record number *Six*, notably on the silken anthemic poise of *Disconnected*, the bump 'n' grind of *Together Alone* and the ballad *Things Will Never Be The Same*. Overland is now his early sixties, but the nickname The Voice is well deserved.

Still missing early FM? Roll the dice and land on a *Six*.

Atlas

Built To Last METALAPOLIS

Mancunian fivesome Atlas offer a fiery yet melodious mix of hard rock and prog-metal, with the high-pitched, occasionally shrill vocals of Craig Wells pitched front and centre. *Built To Last*, the group's third album, includes some agreeable hook-laden moments such as *One More Night* and *Tears*, although in these genre-obsessed days their identity crisis could cost them fans.

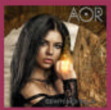
Care Of Night

Reconnected FRONTIERS

The third album from Care Of Night sees the Swedes join the Frontiers roster with a revised line-up and a set of strong-arm, super-hummable AOR belters. One thing that hasn't changed is the quintet's sound, often likened to Journey, Toto and FM. Lead singer Calle Schönberg is very good and knows it, and excells on the super-smooth *Street Runner*. Love it!

AOR

Bewitched In L.A. PERRIS



Frenchman Frédéric Slama is known for a string of collaborator-heavy releases, but on this twenty-third album he bucks the trend by featuring just one lead singer. Within the world of hard rock, Paul Sabu is without doubt an iconic name, but at 63 his voice has seen better days, and as much as nobody enjoys kicking a legend the results are at times inept.

Edge Of Forever

Ritual FRONTIERS

For an album that tells the story of the "last two indigenous people speaking a language soon to be forgotten", *Ritual* is a rousing and fascinating album. The tracks are powerful yet deliciously pompous, driven by the keyboards of Alessandro Del Vecchio, who also fronts the Italian band with the enthusiasm you'd expect from someone with hundreds of album credits.

Stray

About Time *TALKING ELEPHANT*

Rock'n'roll survivor Del Bromham reminds the young 'uns how it's done.

Stray were formed in 1966, the year that England's male footballers lifted the World Cup. Think about that for a moment. Fifty-seven years on, countless bands have felt the words of commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme: "They think it's all over… it is now".

Stray have broken up on four occasions, although they always found a way to pick up the pieces and continue. When we say 'they', we mean Del Bromham, the last remaining original member, although Stray's history is so lengthy and convoluted that there was a short period of time when the guitarist and vocalist found himself out of the band that he had co-founded.

Should you recognise the name yet remain unfamiliar with Stray's music, then it's probably for one of two reasons: during the 70s they found overnight notoriety by making the gangster Charlie Kray, brother of Ronnie and Reggie, their manager; or maybe for the patronage of Steve Harris, whose band Iron Maiden covered the 1970 song *It's All In Your Mind* as the flip-side to their single *Holy Smoke*, or The Damned's Captain Sensible. During the 70s, Kiss and Rush both engaged Stray as an opening act on debut British tours to guarantee a few bums on seats.

In 2023, Bromham is backed by his best Stray line-up in decades and still going strong in his seventies. On the band's first new album in 13 years, the timeless, bluesy hard rock of *About Time* represents a noteworthy milestone in an autumnal purple patch. Written largely in lockdown and through a prism of negativity during the Trump presidency, it's a collection of catchy tunes that sometimes pack pithy social comment.

With tongue in cheek, on opening number *I Am* Bromham announces: '*I am a lion, I'm a tiger, I am a rock'n'roll survivor.'* Another track documents an encounter with an old friend who remarks how well Bromham looks, with Del replying that he is doing what he wants, doing what he likes and still *Living The Dream*.

But there's a darker side to the record, too. *Blood From Stone* rues the rich getting richer. Elsewhere, with its couplet of '*My dad's bigger than your dad, my god's better than yours*', *Shout* wonders aloud why humans feel the need to be such c**ts to one another.

While many others of Bromham vintage are working their allotments rather growing their music, Del Bromham remains committed to rock'n'roll. And ain't that a beautiful thing?

Dave Ling

Bonafide

Are You Listening?

BLACK LODGE

For those about to rock…

If you're going to borrow, then you might as well borrow from the best. Swedes Bonafide clearly know the AC/DC playbook inside out and back to front, and aren't afraid to use it. Fantastic blues-rock riffs, hooky gang vocals, stinging guitar solos, it's all here, delivered with passion, fire and no doubt a cheeky wink. *Who's The Boss* owes more than a drink to *Beating Around The Bush*, the title track sounds like the bastard child of *Live Wire* and *Thunderstruck*, *Rumble* feeds off *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap*… You get the picture. The only time Bonafide come close to switching things up is on the excellent *Dealt A Bad Hand*, where it appears Motörhead are the main inspiration.

If you feel that Angus and co. are taking too long on their next album, while waiting you could always rock the blues away with *Are You Listening?*

Essi Berelian

Juliana Hatfield

Sings ELO *AMERICAN LAUNDROMAT*

A choice selection of Jeff Lynne classics have their country roots caressed by the queen of grunge pop.

It's long been a criminal travesty how little respect the Electric Light Orchestra have been granted by the 90s grunge-pop community. Now, finally this glaring oversight is corrected by Juliana Hatfield's marvellous tribute album to Jeff Lynne's symphonic rock behemoth, gracefully stripping away the strings and overtures and sinking into the sumptuous songcraft of the canon.

Hatfield's clearly a connoisseur of ELO. Only *Telephone Line*, delivered as a doo-wop country lament, could be considered an obvious selection, while some of Lynne's finest orchestral ballads benefit from her elegant and sumptuous electric-folk arrangement: the gorgeously Lennon-esque *Bluebird Is Dead*, dreamy takes on *Can't Get It Out Of My Head* and *Sweet Is The Night*, a lush, multi-harmonied *Strange Magic*. Forgotten 1983 synth-pop single *Secret Messages* becomes a piece of curling grunge rock, and *Showdown* gets a similar garage crunch, while the retro rock'n'roll of *Don't Bring Me Down* is beautifully underplayed.

A triumph, Juliana. Now do *Time*.

Mark Beaumont

Bad Wolves

Die About It *BETTER NOISE*

Modern-metal makeweights' serviceable fourth album.

If Bad Wolves are known at all, it's for their breakout 2017 cover of The Cranberries' *Zombie* and original frontman Tommy Vext's depressing pivot towards anti-woke MAGA-dom. Now they're back with new singer Daniel 'DL' Laskiewicz, and a proficient, if ultimately inconsequential, fourth album.

Die About It hits all the buttons a 21st-century metal band are required to hit: old-school riffs, new-school electronics, nods to trap and hip-hop, and a production that sounds like it's been processed to within an inch of its life. It's not bereft of memorable moments – *Savior* is powered by a big, up-swinging melody – but there's little here to set them apart from a hundred other bands making exactly the same kind of noise. It's the kind of thing that's tailor-made for an early-afternoon Download festival slot, but the prospect of repeated listens is less alluring.

Dave Everley

Gong

Unending Ascending *KSCOPE*

The spirit of the past drives the future and future.

Those critical of Gong's continued existence since the passing of last original member Daevid Allen in 2015 would do well to pause for thought. They'd also do well to listen to the band. Not only is this current line-up their most stable, it was also handpicked by Allen himself for 2014's *I See You*, and it follows his edict of moving upwards and staying positive.

This, their third album following Allen's passing, should establish Gong's motives and credentials to the doubters and the naysayers, while acting as a good jumping-on point for newcomers. Going from hard-riffing onslaughts (*My Guitar Is My Spaceship*) to epic psychedelic flights of fancy

LEE SCRIVEN/PRESS

(*Ship Of Ishtar*) and visiting all points in between – *Choose Your Goddess* blends these approaches to ferment a potent cocktail, the album makes a convincing and conclusive case for Gong's onward ramble through the canyons of their – and indeed, your – minds.

Julian Marszalek

Drop Nineteens

Hard Light WHARF CAT

American shoegazers return after three decades of silence.

It's 30 years since Drop Nineteens split up. In the meantime, shoegaze fell out of fashion, lay dormant, then was reborn under the guise of dream-pop. So, unexpected as it is, given frontman Greg Ackell's reluctance to return to music in the intervening years, it seems like the ideal time for this Boston band to get creative again.

Lead single *Scapa Flow* is a delight, delicate but joyful, its fuzzy guitars and dreamy-eyed romance coming together to create a slice of melodic 90s indie catapulted into the modern day. Johnny Marr's influence shines through *Tarantula*, but that's where the Smiths comparisons begin and end; this album is anchored in beauty, even in darker moments such as *The Price Was High*, which is deftly sweetened by guitarist Paula Kelley's vocals. *Lookout*, meanwhile, even explores jaunty Simon And Garfunkel territory.

Hard Light works so well because rather than clinging on to relevance during the wilderness years, Drop Nineteens have simply waited and let the world catch up with them. And what a ray of sunshine it is.

Emma Johnston

Dirty Honey

Can't Find The Brakes DIRT

Rounding the 'difficult second album' corner without crashing.

Unashamedly old-school, Dirty Honey sound like mid-70s Aerosmith, with a dash of Led Zeppelin due to Marc LaBelle's vocals. Better still, nothing sounds forced. The only thing mannered is their wardrobe.

While no track on new album *Can't Find The Brakes* is radically original, there's still plenty to enjoy, not least opener *Don't Put Out The Fire*, a slow-burner with shades of AC/DC. *Won't Take Me Alive* is pure vintage Aerosmith (not as sharp lyrically, but nice and ratty nonetheless), while on *Dirty Mind* new drummer Jaydon Bean follows a Joey Kramer-style swing groove.

They're not quite as effective when they drop down a gear to aim for a big ballad with *Roam* and closer *You Make It All Right*, but the acoustic *Coming Home (Ballad Of The Shire)* is pretty good. Ultimately, though, Dirty Honey are best when putting boot to buttock. The title track is particularly fabulous and effortlessly funky, and the band can be proud of that.

Neil Jeffries

Green Lung

The Heathen Land

NUCLEAR BLAST

The Blood on Satan's claw of rock'n'roll.

Although they formed just a few years ago, London's Green Lung have existed as a concept since Louisa Livingstone haunted that Oxfordshire water mill on the cover of *Black Sabbath*. It was only a matter of time before a band mined early-70s folk horror, wyrd Britain and hauntology for inspiration. Naturally they wrap it all up in a black cloak of thunderous doom rock.

Heathen Land sounds like the album Green Lung have been trying to make for the past five years, full of spectacle, bombast and fog-choked atmosphere. Organ-heavy opener *Forest Church* sounds like they recorded it in a cathedral on Christmas Day, *The Ancient Ways* sounds like Ghost with a *Wicker Man* obsession, and *Song Of The Stones* is superbly creepy acid-folk.

If you've read *Old Weird Albion*, this album makes a fine companion piece. If you haven't, a strange, phantasmagorical new world awaits you.

Sleazegrinder

Thunderstick

Lockdown SELF-RELEASED

Second album from reunited line-up led by former Samson drummer.

Since rehabilitating the band that bears his stage name in 2017 and releasing the lively comeback album *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, Barry 'Thunderstick' Purkis has overseen a fair few personnel changes, including the introduction of their third vocalist. Raven Blackwing (for it is she) does an arresting job of fronting this first studio album in six years, particularly on the galloping assault of *Those Daze,* where her full-blooded tones strut and scream over a winningly immediate riff hook.

At times, however, on tracks such as the 10-minute *Warhead*, it sounds a little flabby and in need of editing – rabble-rousing without really drawing blood. They fare best when there's a power-metal propulsion and a strong melodic thrust to their songs, as on *Hold On Me* and *Valkyrie Warriors*, the latter as stirring a battle anthem as its title suggests.

Johnny Sharp

Lynch Mob

Babylon FRONTIERS

George returns to the fray.

Reactivating Lynch Mob for album number eight – despite having said the problematic band name was to be retired – guitarist George Lynch is back for the band's first album since 2017's *The Brotherhood*. And it's pretty much as you would expect – Lynch's pyrotechnic fretboard skills, ably supported by his latest line-up, although singer Gabriel Colón might be an acquired taste.

The new band chemistry works best on epic eight-minute closer *Babylon,* with Lynch delivering one of the best solos on the album, while the more concise *I'm Ready* feels like classic Roth-era Van Halen, and *How You Fall* provides a speedy showcase for long-standing drummer Jimmy D'Anda.

Look no further for hard-rocking riffs aplenty.

Essi Berelian

ROUND-UP: **BLUES**

By Henry Yates

The Wanton Bishops: the beginning of a magnetic new chapter.

The Wanton Bishops

Under The Sun

GNU ROAM/KARTEL MUSIC GROUP

When Wanton Bishops guitarist Eddy Ghossein quit the Lebanese band (and the business) after their debut, he took the money licks with him. But while singer Nader Mansour's remodelling of the admired duo as an Eastern-tinged electro-blues solo project won't please purists, it's the most compelling move he could have made.

Opener *Don't You Touch The Radio* exemplifies the new sound, all synthy bass, one-chord vamps, interloping harmonica and processed gothy vocals. *Do What You're Told* is another high point, with its trashy guitars, while ear-wormy jangler *Gonna Be Fine*'s benevolent chorus ('*Everybody here is gonna be fine*') is offset by a vicious swipe at modern bohos ('*yoga pants and Indian chants and spoilt rich brats doing shit handstands*'). But you suspect the song that Mansour really wants to resonate is *Beirut*, a skewed love-letter to his troubled home city, its groove full of anger and the embers of hope. It's the pick of a magnetic new chapter.

Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram

Live In London ALLIGATOR

The Clarksdale boy wonder has a way to go to plant his flag Bonamassa-deep in the UK, but all who saw this stinging London set will surely return in force. Ingram settles in fast on *She Calls Me Kingfish*, with its whisper-to-scream solo and witty lyric. By instrumental *Mississippi Night*, the early adopters are eating from his hand.

Ian Shaw

Greek Street Friday

SILENT WISH

Jazzer, comedian, actor, DJ and activist, here we find Shaw at his funkiest (and funniest), channelling influences like Little Feat and Steely Dan into acerbic modern gripes. The wit makes it all the more poignant when he drops a beauty like the title track, dissecting the wrench of a lonely weekend and the cold bite of Monday morning.

Bo Diddley & Ron Terry

New Songs From The Vault

MORACE FILMS MUSIC

Some real sunken treasure here on these unheard years-old performances. And while some will come for ridiculously the starry guest list – Ron Wood, Keith Moon, Mick Fleetwood, Billy Joel, on and on – the main event is that much-missed 'chunka-chunk' *Not Fade Away* rhythm by the man who minted it.

Erja Lyytinen

Diamonds On The Road: Live 2023 TUOHI

Three previous live albums suggest Finnish slide specialist Erja Lyytinen is most comfortable with a club crowd, and the songs from 2022's excellent *Waiting For The Daylight* buck harder here as she and her band reach full velocity at the close of last spring's tour. *Bad Seed* and *Black Ocean*, in particular, are pulverising.

Van Morrison

Accentuate The Positive *EXILE*

Van the Man takes ownership of an archipelago's worth of his desert island discs.

"Rock'n'roll is about simplicity, sincerity and expressive power and there's no way you can get away from that," Van Morrison says about his new album of old classics. "That's why it's good and that's why it's lasted. It's spirit music."

Accentuate The Positive is a welcome recording from Morrison for a number of reasons. Firstly, his recent albums have, if anything, tended to accentuate the negative, with their occasional diversions into the world of conspiracy theory. Musically, too, they've avoided the long, passionate workouts of his best records, leaning heavily on his R&B roots (although those are pretty good roots to lean on). For some it's a long way from the poetry and mysticism of Morrison's best work (even if it is still away with the fairies). Still, things in Morrison's world have always had a tendency to slouch towards Bethlehem in one form or another.

Either way, it's something of a relief that *Accentuate The Positive* is, purely and simply, a covers album, a collection of songs taken mostly from the middle of the 20th century, arranged in the style of whichever R&B, country or rock'n'roll version means the most to him, and performed with the majestic casualness that only Van Morrison can bring to a song. It's to his credit – and entirely unsurprising as well – that at no point does Morrison do what most artists do with a record comprised entirely of cover versions, namely to bugger about with them until they are bloated and horrible. Instead he sticks closely to his favourite arrangements, but, being one of the great geniuses of popular music, also manages to make these hairy old oldies his own.

There's a lot of material here, enough to fill a small jukebox, from a gorgeous take on *You Are My Sunshine* to a fantastic, knee-trembling *Shakin' All Over*, and it all works. Morrison is like a guest on a musical chat show, turning these songs into musical anecdotes, perfectly illustrating the music that made him and that inspired him. And the sense of fun which only rarely comes over in his work – songs like *The Days Before Rock'n'Roll* and *Cleaning Windows* – is still here in covers of Big Joe Turner's *Flip, Flop And Fly* and, perhaps most surprisingly, Chuck Berry's *Bye Bye Johnny*. Throughout, Morrison makes old songs sound new and brings the enthusiasm of a teenager to an old man's record.

David Quantick

Dictator Ship

Electric Jihad *THE SIGN*

Leather-clad Michigan mayhem, straight outta Stockholm.

From its opening fusillade there's absolutely no doubting that this is a quite extraordinary record. Anyone with even the slightest penchant for the rock, the roll or any combination of the two can't help but feel an instantaneously involuntary compulsion to strap on the old invisible guitar and throw a broad selection of shapes to its rip-roaring charms.

That said, let's not delude ourselves that any boundaries are going to be broken across the course of its rabble-rousing 39-minute duration. It's as generic as all hell, reeks of delicious familiarity, and not one of its core ingredients was forged after 1979.

So when you've finished punching the sky, what's so right about it? Well, it sounds like the *Back In The USA* MC5, even though there's only four of them; there's a distinct tincture of Roy Thomas Baker about its BVs; sedate tempos only ever happen to the other guys; and, like all the best 21st-century Detroit rock'n'roll, it's from Sweden.

So what are you waiting for?

Ian Fortnam

Blues Traveler

Traveler's Soul *ROUND HILL*

Travelers show their soulful side.

What Eddie Van Halen was to the guitar, Blues Traveler frontman John Popper is to the harmonica, as demonstrated on YouTube footage of their recent cover of Van Halen's *Hot For Teacher*. Their free-spirited fusion of blues, Americana and jam-band improvisation earned them platinum albums in the 90s, and has sustained them as a hot live ticket since regrouping after cornerstone bassist Bobby Sheehan's death in 1999.

Continuing the re-connection with early influences begun with 2021's *Traveler's Blues*, they now channel the soul side of the Blues Brothers Band (home to most of Booker T's M.G.'s). Popper's harp licks and heartfelt vocals, and a sense of live-in-the-studio spontaneity, enliven familiar standards (*Tired Of Being Alone*, *I Can't Stand The Rain*), but things really ignite on less obvious choices like Dr John's funky *Qualified*, and infectious, Stax-inspired makeovers of TLC's *Waterfalls* and Deee-Lite's *Groove Is In The Heart*.

Rich Davenport

False Fed

Let Them Eat Fake *NEUROT*

Discharge man grimly expands his horizons.

Solid contenders for the coveted mantle of Crustiest Supergroup Ever, False Fed are the brainchild of Discharge frontman Jeff Janiak. Normally found bellowing over stupidly fast D-beats, he's joined forces with former Amebix guitarist Stig C Miller, bassist JP Parsons and iconic metal drummer Roy Mayorga (Soulfly/Stone Sour) for a slow-burning journey into bleak, dystopian post-punk.

The first revelation is Janiak's vocals, which make for a versatile and compelling focal point amid the ambling, Joy Division-like grind of opener *Superficial*. On the bitter, gothic rumble of *Echoes Of Compromise*, he alternates between cobwebbed basso croon and pop-eyed incensed roar, as False Fed's sonorous assault ebbs and flows around him. Darker and gnarlier than post-punk revival average, tracks like grim disco stomp *Dreadful Necessities* showcase a band with eerie chemistry, and a vocalist with a thousand ideas and a newly minted project to try them out in. In crust we still trust.

Dom Lawson

Kenny Wayne Shepherd

Dirt On My Diamonds Vol 1 *PROVOGUE*

Keeping the blues under control.

These days Kenny Wayne Shepherd tends to keep his blues lurking low in the mix, waiting for the chance to break out from under the bright, sassy classic rock riffs and melodies he's been perfecting over the past couple of albums. But there's no denying the impact when Shepherd does let the blues off the leash, like the stunning solo that rips through the middle of this album's *Sweet And Low* or the brief bursts that punctuate *Bad Intentions*. The final track, the slow, repetitive *Ease My Mind*,

BRADLEY QUINN/PRESS

is all blues, reaping the benefits of the smart production.

However, there are moments when the album sounds a little too clean, when even the power chords gleam. The contrast when Shepherd drops his guard for a raucous cover of Elton John's *Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting* and lets fly with a blistering solo at the end is vivid.

Hugh Fielder

Madness

Theatre Of The Absurd Presents C'est La Vie *BMG*

One-time nutty ska boys become certifiable rock-opera men on studio album 13.

Now in their 60s, North London geezers Madness moved on from the wacky, nutty schtick decades ago, and have since been plying an increasingly impressive songwriting trade. Their main composer, keyboard player Mike Barson, has an incredible career as an accomplished arranger, and this album could well be his masterpiece, with the blues-funk of *If I Go Mad*, the stomping up-stroke rocksteady of *C'est La Vie*, the beautiful strings of *Hour Of Need* and the Talking Heads-style avant-funk of *Run For Your Life*.

Like their 2009 album *The Liberty Of Norton Folgate*, it's something of a loose conceptual work. Lead vocalist Suggs delivers an extraordinary theatrical performance, with an orchestra underlying his Dury-alike 'speak singing' of *Theatre Of The Absurd*, there's a full soul revue in *Round We Go*, and a remarkable oratorial pomp on *The Law According to Dr Kippah*.

The roaring 20s has finally arrived.

Alex Burrows

King Crimson

Music Is Our Friend

PANEGYRIC

Court and spark.

Vinyl fans can now celebrate what is likely to be King Crimson's final performance, in Washington DC in September 2021, with this triple set. With the band having ground to a halt twice in the first decade of this century, hopes were not high when Fripp re-formed the band in 2014, particularly as there had been no new material since 2003.

But the self-proclaimed "seven-headed beast" featured three drummers that precipitated a major overhaul of the back catalogue. The results were clearly audible on 2016's *Radical Action* and the changes have continued since. Indeed, the pandemic pandemonium that surrounded their 2021 US tour seemed to spur them on.

Neurotica, from 1982's *Beat*, was added to the set-list, along with the restored middle section of *Larks' Tongues In Aspic Part 1*. There are memorable renditions of *Starless* and *Islands*, and an awesome encore of *21st Century Schizoid Man*, one of three tracks from their 1969 debut.

Hugh Fielder

Alabama 3

Cold War Classics Vol. 2

SUBMARINE CAT

Larry Love and the gang return with another hefty dose of deep grooves and the truth.

It's a special talent, being able to bring delirious party vibes to the darkest, grubbiest corners of society, but that's what Alabama 3 have been doing for close to 30 years. On new album *Cold War Classics Vol. 2*, against a backdrop of terrifying global politics they're raving from the brink of apocalypse, their unique blend of country, blues and techno lighting up the darkness with strobes of lyrical realness.

Touching on the cost-of-living-crisis, climate change, the plight of refugees, war and social decay, the skill is in taking the heaviest subjects and shaking a tail feather right in their face, from the groove-laden gospel of *The Influencer Blues* urging us to get offline and go and live, to the deeply sarcastic *Thank You*, a barbed state-of-the-nation address to the powers that be and the absolute shit-heap of a state they've left the UK in. Brassy acid-blues rubs shoulders with dewy-eyed country, while bassy, paranoid techno muscles in at just the right points. Fury has never sounded so funky.

Emma Johnston

Lonely The Brave

What We Do To Feel *EASY LIFE*

Cambridgeshire post-hardcore crew keep the drama coming with album four.

For a band whose career has been based on crafting fist-in-the-air anthems aimed firmly at stadium-sized singalongs, there remains something distinctly unstarry about Lonely The Brave. There's an impression that their ambition lies in chiselling out elegant post-hardcore swooners whether anyone's listening or not, and that remaining slightly off the mainstream radar suits them down to the ground.

What We Do To Feel is their second album with vocalist Jack Bennet, and his earnest emoting has bedded in nicely, lending depth to the swirling emo melodicism anchoring the whole thing, shades of *Hundred Reasons* raising their head in one moment, and the more arch, artful, progressive hints of the much-missed Aereogramme the next. As such, this album works best as a start-to-end mood piece, better suited to full immersion than hacking out choice cuts. It's graceful stuff, but unlikely to turn them into household names – just, you'd suspect, as they like it.

Emma Johnston

Maebe

Rebirth, Relive, Repeat

MAEBE.BANDCAMP.COM

Post-rock instrumental epics from the West Country.

The signs were there on Maebe's self-titled 2020 debut album that mainman, Bristolian guitarist Michael Astley-Brown, was one to watch. And that's very much born out on this, his second release. Although Maebe are a ten-legged beast in the live arena, in the studio it's largely Astley-Brown alone and here he expands on the debut's blueprint, creating an abum of varying degrees of light and shade.

Being a) from the post-rock world, and b) instrumental, will almost certainly be a hindrance to those not fond of either, but *Rebirth, Relive, Repeat* is an album imbued with many musical styles, also touching on prog, math-rock and even Joe Satriani-esque, hard rocking guitar runs to appeal to guitar aficionados. It rocks more than the debut too, so despite the apparent limitations of instrumental post-rock to some, Maebe's spreading of their musical wings on *Rebirth, Relive, Repeat* should undoubtedly serve them well for the future.

Jerry Ewing

BEST OF THE REST

Other new releases out this month.

Stepmother

Planet Brutalicon *TEE PEE*

An appropriately titled act of untrammelled sonic savagery from an Australian power trio fronted by Witch's Graham Clise. It's a bit Damned, a bit early Misfits, but mostly the sort of thing that'll cause you to break the furniture. Or a leg. *Scream For Death*'s a nice tune. **8/10**

Helltones

Medusa *HELLTONES*

An octet of partially re-formed Oakland garage rockers present an old-school combo of organ-spiced psychedelic soul, BV-heavy Brill Building sodapop rock'n'roll, paisley street smarts, and sunglasses after dark. Willy De Ville-meets-El Vez at a Tarantino showdown. **7/10**

Oxymorrons

Melanin Punk *MASCOT*

Self-defined "boundary pushing melanated punk band" Oxymorrons' raw amalgam of rap 'n' rock might ring reverse-capped nu-metal alarm bells, but this year's model's been rethought from the ground up. Pan-generic, neoteric; 21st-century hip-pop distilled. **8/10**

The Guru Guru

Make (Less) Babies *HUMMUS*

Propelling a deliciously disconcerting prog complexity with a precise post-punk urgency, unaccountably accessible Belgian quintet the Guru Guru never fail to surprise. Imagine listening to Soulwax while having a migraine. Multiplied by Wire. **8/10**

King Falcon

King Falcon *MASCOT*

This indie-weaned Queens trio insinuate the merest suggestion of punchy NYC guitar 'tude into an eager-to-please, gang-vocalled power-pop template that calls to mind (encouragingly) Cheap Trick and (worryingly) the Bloodhound Gang. Infectiously hooky. **7/10**

NOBRO

Set Your Pussy Free *DINE ALONE*

Montreal's NOBRO do themselves no favours by self-identifying as a 'punk outfit'. Yes, they're all about self-determination, full-tilt riffs and edgy tunes as artillery, but 'punk' reeks of the past. SYPF's all about now: vivacious, assertive, joyous, essential. **8/10**

ONI

The Silver Line *BLOODBLAST*

A third slice of collab-spiced mainstream-seducing crossover metalcore from Canada's Jake Oni (the project's sole driving force), which this time features guest spots from Kellin 'Sleeping With Sirens' Quinn, Jared 'YouTuber' Dines and Howard 'not that one' Jones. **7/10**

Menzingers

Some Of It Was True *EPITAPH*

Though as intrinsically blue-collar, workmanlike and lumpen as one might expect of any band who insist that they're a punk band despite all evidence to the contrary, Scranton, PA's 'Zingers exhibit a whole lotta heart. But sometimes heart alone's not enough. **5/10**

Pat Todd & The Rankoutsiders

Sons Of The City Ditch *DOG MEAT*

Former frontman of LA-roots-punk stalwarts Lazy Cowgirls, Pat Todd has edged ever closer to the very essence of rock'n'roll since unleashing The Rankoutsiders in '04, and *Sons Of The City Ditch* is a raw-assed Heartbreakers/Stones hybrid any self-respecting hoodlum ought to own. **8/10**

Robert Finley

Black Bayou *EASY EYE SOUND*

Anyone who's a fan of Andre Williams (and anyone who isn't should seek help), will find a lot to love here as Louisianian soul/bluesman, Dan Auerbach associate Finley applies versatile pipes and stinging licks to extraordinary songs of broad experience. Ace. **8/10**

Gypsy Pistoleros

Duende A Go Go Loco! *EARACHE*

Still unilaterally subtitling themselves 'The Greatest Flamenco Punk Glam Band Ever!' the GP's are nowhere near as good as you hope. Specifically, they're a hell of a lot more punk-glam than they are flamenco. And they do *Come On Eileen*. Big mistake. Big. Huge. **5/10**

BEST OF THE REST REVIEWS BY IAN FORTNAM

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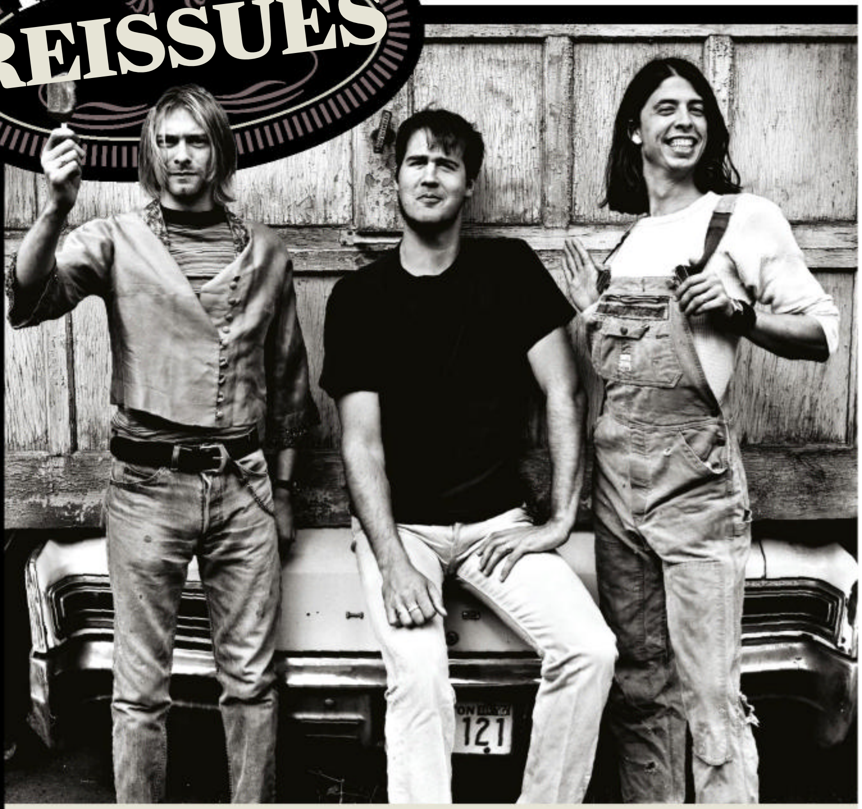
THE HARD STUFF REISSUES



Nirvana

In Utero (30th Anniversary) *GEFFEN/UME*

Band's third and last studio album, now with bonus material, depending on which format.

Nirvana's first album (*Bleach*, '89) was warped, made strange by the band's then-current influences (Soundgarden and the grunge scene in Seattle, mostly). The second (*Nevermind*, '91) was odder still, a zeitgeist-grabbing moment wherein pop thrill met metal overspill. The third (*In Utero*, '93) should have been weaker, weighed down by the burden of expectation. That it wasn't is some testament to the triumph of will on the part of the three core members, and Kurt Cobain's punk-rock upbringing.

In Utero is where Nirvana became themselves in the studio. Live, they had been themselves since at least 1990. The drums are thunderous, the guitar never less than scouring and abrasive. Steve Albini's engineering (please don't call it 'production') is brutally apposite: the spotlight he shines on Cobain, Krist Novoselic and Dave Grohl is unrelenting. The flaws and the tumult and the battles are there for all to hear. Cobain's voice sounds near demonic in places (*Scentless Apprentice*, on which his scream seems to sum up the anguish and alienation of a generation). The mood is supercharged, clammy, claustrophobic – you can taste the dank and damp of Seattle's basements, LA's squalid second-storey apartments within its grooves. Rarely has mainstream music sounded so sarcastic, so lonely. *'I miss the comfort in being sad,'* Cobain screams on *Frances Farmer Will Have Her Revenge On Seattle*, one of many tracks both inspired by and helped into shape by his wife.

The moments of relief aren't relief as such, just a slight lightening of the mood brought about by Scott Litt's remixes on singles *All Apologies* and *Heart-Shaped Box*, the R.E.M. producer brought in after the record company got scared the initial mix of the album was too extreme for the mainstream market. (Hardly – it debuted at No.1 on *Billboard*, unheard.) Neither track was exactly easy listening (nor was *Rape Me*, with its inverted *Teen Spirit* refrain), even with their damnably catchy tunes. I wrote of *All Apologies*, the album's closing track, in *Melody Maker*: "The most supremely resigned, supremely weary fuck-you to the outside world I've heard this year." I still find it near impossible to listen to, such is its emotional pull.

This year being the 30th anniversary of *In Utero*'s original release, the reissues come in several formats, ranging from a Super Deluxe box (eight LPs or five CDs) to standard digital/CD and single-disc vinyl with bonus 10-inch. All reissues feature five bonus tracks and B-sides, and the Super Deluxe has two complete shows.

Unmatchable.

Everett True

Muse

Absolution XX Anniversary *WARNER*

Two-decades-old celebration of the band's classic.

As far as landmark albums go, they don't come much bigger than *Absolution*. Dismissed initially as Radiohead copyists, this was the record that blasted Muse into the stadium-slaying stratosphere, earning them their first No.1 album and a triumphant but also tragic headline slot at Glastonbury after drummer Dominic Howard's dad died hours after their performance.

Recorded in a post-9/11 world while an (illegal) war in Iraq was kicking off, *Absolution* saw Muse get angry as they marched into the 21st century armed with dark anthems fuelled by fear and paranoia. Whether it was the end of the world (*Apocalypse Please*) or tales of abduction (*Stockholm Syndrome*) frontman Matt Bellamy sang about, it didn't matter. These brilliantly constructed grandiose songs would become the blueprint for the band from here on in. Standout anthems like the stomping *Time Is Running Out* and the bulldozing *Hysteria* sat perfectly next to pensive piano ballads such as *Sing For Absolution* and *Ruled By Secrecy*.

This 20th-anniversary reissue comes with the remastered album and bonus audio on both CD and vinyl, along with an excellent 40-page book detailing how the album came together. Among the pick of the B-sides is an outstanding live version of *Blackout* at Vienna's Antic Arena, and a stripped-back take of *Butterflies & Hurricanes*.

If an apocalypse is on the horizon, this is one album that should be turned up loud before our time runs out.

Damian Jones

Thunder

Reissues *BMG*

Middling Thunder albums get spruced up.

Coming from a somewhat choppy period for the band, *The Thrill Of It All* (1996), *Giving The Game Away* (1999) and *Shooting At The Sun* (2003) are commendable albums rather than up there with Thunder's best. But reissued in various collectable formats, with four live bonus tracks apiece – some rarities, some previously unreleased – they become more than worthy of consideration.

The Thrill Of It All, decent if ultimately unspectacular, features a very fine previously unreleased version of *Welcome To The Party* recorded in Japan in 2000, plus a silkily funky take on *Don't Wait Up*. *Giving The Game Away*, released shortly before the band's first split, is a relatively laid-back affair, and the reissued version benefits from a passionately soulful live take of *Numb*, and a previously unreleased version of *Rolling The Dice* from 2007.

Comeback album *Shooting At The Sun* is a far more potent proposition, and this reissue boasts a sparky couple of previously unreleased bonuses in *Everybody's Laughing* from 2011 and *The Pimp And The Whore* from 2008.

Despite the long-term career difficulties and occasionally uneven studio records, this is a perfect opportunity to fill those back-catalogue gaps if you've got them.

All

Essi Berelian

Mötley Crüe

Shout At The Devil *BMG*

Glam-metal foundation stone gets luxury 40th-anniversary treatment.

The fact that Mötley Crüe's second and greatest album has been reissued more often than Tommy Lee has whipped out his dong on stage doesn't diminish its pouting, satanic panic-inducing glory. *Looks That Kill*, the title track and the killer *Too Young To Fall In Love* mark the point where early-80s metal transformed into Sunset Strip glam, while even their hamfisted version of The Beatles' *Helter Skelter* captures the death-or-glory self-delusion that helped turn the Crüe into superstars.

The basic version of this 40th-anniversary edition adds an extra disc of rough-arsed but exhilarating demos – including early versions of album out-takes *Black Widow* and *Hotter Than Hell*, aka *Louder Than Hell* – that reveal their rough-arsed punk roots. But it's the blockbusting super-deluxe version, a full six inches deep, that brings the 'Wow'. This

ANTON CORBIJN/PRESS

tombstone-sized box houses all the Crüeabilia any devotee with a spare £150-plus would want. Splatter-coloured vinyl of the original albums and the demo disc are complemented by replica seven-inchers of *Looks That Kill* and *Shout At The Devil*, plus trinkets that lean into the parent-baiting occult shtick of the original released: tarot cards, a (paper) ouija board, a demonic pottery candleholder. OTT? Of course. But then OTT was what Mötley Crüe always did best.

Dave Everley

Jimi Hendrix Experience

Live At The Hollywood Bowl, August 18, 1967

EXPERIENCE HENDRIX

An early onslaught in the US finds the trio establishing their credentials.

Such is the towering legacy of Jimi Hendrix that it can become all too easy to forget his struggle in establishing his talents. Be it racism, bad management or his own uncompromising vision, Hendrix's career was one endless battle to be accepted on his own terms. *Hollywood Bowl, August 18, 1967* is a case in point.

Having travelled to England to establish his musical identity by forming the Jimi Hendrix Experience in late 1966, the trio were still to make any kind of dent in the US. With their headline set at the 1967 Monterey Pop festival and ill-fated tour with The Monkees behind them, the band found themselves at the Hollywood Bowl at the behest of singer John Phillips, and sandwiched between his group the Mamas And The Papas and opening act Scott McKenzie.

Despite the sonic limitations of the two-track source material, the sheer firepower of the Jimi Hendrix Experience is palpable throughout. While Hendrix takes his guitar to dizzying levels (see *Purple Haze*, a US flop), his bandmates play just as vital a role. Noel Redding's superb bass playing underpins an incendiary *Catfish Blues*, which includes a precise drum solo that reveals Mitch Mitchell's jazz roots. There's also tenderness (*The Wind Cries Mary*), and Hendrix's under-appreciated singing voice is warm and rich throughout.

Recorded just five days before the US release of their debut album *Are You Experienced*, and with *Axis: Bold As Love* already in the can, this is the sound of the future fighting against the odds.

Julian Marszalek

Caravan

Reissues PROPER/UMR

Delightful reissues that bookended their Decca years.

With logic befitting their time signatures, Caravan's first and final (fifth) albums for Decca Records now get vinyl reissues. The misunderstood Canterbury craftsmen were prog-adjacent, sure, but their knack for melody and shy understatement, even when deigning to rock out, separates them from any genre. In fact on 1970's *If I Could Do It All Over Again, I'd Do It All Over You* (**8/10**) you can discern a strong Beatles influence. Their hesitancy as to whether to highlight tunes or adventurous musicianship makes for a between-two-worlds sound which is deeply alluring and pleasurable, not least on *And I Wish I Were Stoned/Don't Worry*, which offers both easy charm and deft trickery. Ah yes, those titles of theirs. Divisive, although *Can't Be Long Now*, lasting 14 minutes, is a dry joke that works.

Their second and fourth albums were their best, but we skip now to 1975's *Cunning Stunts* (**7/10**), which takes a while to love, and not just because of that title. Oddly, opener *The Show Of Our Lives* is an atypical bore. Stick with the album, though, because the 18-minute *The Dabsong Conshirtoe* might be the most successful multi-part epic of their career outside *Nine Feet Underground*. It's all sweetly reminiscent of an England with a pussycat heart.

Chris Roberts

Bob Dylan

The Complete Budokan 1978 SONY

It's All Right, ma.

Bob Dylan At Budokan took a critical kicking when it was released in 1979. While a jaunty *Mr Tambourine Man* complete with Steve Douglas's dancing flute is still disconcerting, perhaps the press were being a bit hard on Bob, although what those same writers would make of a previously unreleased supper-club instrumental of *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* is anyone's guess.

There's a touch of Elvis In Vegas about these dense, big-band arrangements. *Love Minus Zero/No Limit* could be a distant cousin of *Burning Love*, but it's then-new songs such as *Is Your Love In Vain?* from *Street-Legal* and groovy Dr Johnish updates of *Oh, Sister* and *One More Cup Of Coffee (Valley Below)* from *Desire* that come off best.

While this expanded (two full shows from the famed Budokan arena in Tokyo) collection isn't quite the revelation that the 1999 remix of *Street-Legal* was, the sound is much improved from the original, and, once you bypass a reggaed-up *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right* that would test even the most devoted Dylanite, you'll find nuggets worth panning for, such as a dripping-with-regret *I Threw It All Away* and a beautifully ragged *Just Like A Woman*. Why *The Man In Me*, on which Dylan delivers some real soul, wasn't on the original album is a mystery.

The Complete Budokan 1978 is hardly likely to convert Dylan doubters, but it's an interesting curio all the same.

Pat Carty

Frank Zappa & The Mothers

Over-nite Sensation

UNIVERSAL

Five-disc, 88-track 50th-anniversary reissue, featuring 57 previously unreleased tracks.

When *Over-nite Sensation* was first released in 1973, it clocked around the somewhat brief 34-minute mark. The album wasn't terribly well-received at the time, with critics lambasting Zappa's tendency for Robert Crumb-type lewdness on *Camarillo Brillo*, for example, that pervades the album. It was only later, when Zappa's career was long done, that it was more kindly assessed, although the feeling does at times remain that every time Zappa opens his mouth he's in danger of undermining his own creations and the musicianship of the Mothers.

The album, which eventually went gold, at once shares similar American mainstream boogie dirt paths with the likes of Little Feat, while maintaining the dazzling, ostentatious quasi-orchestral flourishes that were Zappa's stock-in-trade. Its highlight is *I Am The Slime*, on which Zappa's deeply sardonic non-vocalising is a strength rather than, as so often is the case, a weakness, as he scorns the daily drip-feed of mind-rotting toxicity of American TV. It features Tina Turner on backing vocals, although her husband Ike was so disdainful of the project that he tried to insist Tina be paid no more than 25 dollars for the session. (Zappa paid her 25 dollars per hour). Elsewhere, on *Fifty Fifty* Zappa enlists the vocal assistance of the amusingly histrionic Ricky Lancelotti amid multiple stereo-panning effects.

This reissue features multiple live and alternative takes of the original tracks, including a version of *Dinah Moe-Humm* that is absolutely as funky as Sly Stone, as well as early versions of tracks that would emerge only on later albums such as *Inca Roads*, one of his loveliest 70s albums, and it's a pleasure to hear a variation on it. There are a number of live tracks that affirm the sort of rapport Zappa had with large audiences by this point, including *The Dynamic Sal Marquez*, on which he describes playing the Hollywood Palladium as like "playing to neighbours".

Best of all, especially to modern ears for whom Zappa's vocal satire has staled, are the jams and lengthy instrumentals here – *RDNZL*, featuring the always welcome electric violin of Jean-Luc Ponty, for example, and *Palladium Jam* on which Zappa shuts up and plays his guitar.

David Stubbs

Motörhead

Another Perfect Day (40th Anniversary Edition) *BMG*

The band's most underrated album gets the deluxe treatment.

For two of Britain's loudest bands, 1983 was a funny old year. Black Sabbath had ex-Deep Purple star Ian Gillan singing for them, and Motörhead had Brian Robertson, formerly of Thin Lizzy, on guitar. Image-wise there were problems. Both of these new guys looked out of place in bands whose clobber was uniformly black: Gillan rocking his usual blue denim, Robbo, more controversially, daring to stand on stage alongside 'Head guvnor Lemmy in dinky satin shorts and espadrilles. The difference was in what each of them brought to the music. Gillan proved a total mismatch for Sabbath; their one-off collaboration on the album *Born Again* was a ghastly business. Robertson, however, was brilliant on Motörhead's *Another Perfect Day*, even though that was also a one-off.

According to Lemmy, the guitarist's outré fashion sense not only "horrified" Motörhead fans, but also revealed an attitude problem. "All that shit about being dressed differently, wearing stupid shorts, it was just to get at me," Lem grumbled. "Or make sure everybody knew he wasn't in Motörhead, just a featured guest artist, doing us a favour." That said, Lemmy did conclude that *Another Perfect Day* was "very good… it stood the test of time". And the old warhorse wasn't wrong.

Motörhead's legend was built on four classic albums made by the definitive line-up of Lemmy, guitarist 'Fast' Eddie Clark and drummer 'Philthy Animal' Taylor: *Overkill*, *Bomber*, *Ace Of Spades* and the live blitz *No Sleep 'til Hammersmith*. But in all the years that followed Robertson's exit, the band never made a better album than *Another Perfect Day*.

All things being relative, Robbo's melodic touch brought a touch of finesse to Motörhead's white-knuckle heavy-metal rock'n'roll on tracks such as *Shine*, *I Got Mine* and *Dancing On Your Grave*. The latter, translated into Portuguese, gave a name to the young Sepultura. But there was nothing subtle about the final track, a quintessential Motörhead racket titled, with suitable emphasis, *Die You Bastard!*

The new *40th Anniversary Edition*, on two-CD and triple-vinyl formats, comes with a concert recording from Hull City Hall in June '83, plus a few mundane rough demos. While the live set is impressively rowdy, it's more remarkable for what they didn't play. There are eight tracks from *Another Perfect Day*, but no *Overkill*, *Bomber*, *Motörhead* or *Ace Of Spades*. It's weird – but not as weird as Sabbath with Gillan doing *Smoke On The Water*.

Paul Elliott

Whitesnake

The Purple Album: 50th Anniversary Special Gold Edition *RHINO*

A Deep delve into Coverdale's Purple patch.

It seems David Coverdale has invented time travel. Whitesnake's original *The Purple Album* was released in 2015, yet suddenly we're celebrating its 50th anniversary. That means it's now the year 2065 and this senile scribe is 110 years old. Writing about David Cassidy. Or David Hasselhoff. (Er… what's a David?)

Hang on. What Coverdale is actually commemorating is the half-century mark of his appointment as Deep Purple frontman. Prior to that 1973 event, the singer had been flogging loon pants at a menswear shop in North-East England. (The epithet 'singing salesman from Redcar' lingers.)

The Purple Album received one god-awful drubbing in *Classic Rock* upon its original release. Unfairly, we cry. Yes, some of the tracks are unbearably histrionic. Yes, the absence of vocal sparring partner Glenn Hughes is acutely noticeable. And yes, Dave's larynx would benefit from a squirt of Castrol GTX. But throughout – from *Burn* to *Soldier Of Fortune* to a frankly astonishing 'punch in the nuts' mix of *Stormbringer* – the keywords are 'affection' and 'respect'.

What makes this reissue essential is the inclusion of Coverdale's long-lost 1972 Purple audition tape. A 21-year-old DC comin' atcha like a terminally laid-back Paul Rodgers on *Dancing In The Street*? That's worth the price of admission alone.

Geoff Barton

Bush

Loaded: The Greatest Hits *ROUND HILL*

Definitive overview of 90s alt.rock survivors' career.

Like the similarly reviled Stone Temple Pilots a couple of years before them, Bush were the people's grunge band. When they rocketed to popularity and up the charts just months after Kurt Cobain's death, their detractors slapped them down as cynical bandwagon jumpers, although the six million people who bought their 1994 debut album *Sixteen Stone* had no such qualms.

Chronologically charting the ex-pat Londoners' journey from post-Nirvana buzz band to latter-day 90s survivors, this 'greatest hits' collection is front-loaded with the big numbers from *Sixteen Stone* and its Steve Albini-produced follow-up *Razorblade Suitcase*. Frontman Gavin Rossdale's post-punk roots are buried deep in the likes of *Everything Zen*, *Machinehead*, *Glycerine* and *Swallowed*, supplanted by his band's ability to write gleaming, if knotty, arena-sized anthems.

As that initial rush of success abated, things got more interesting. Overlooked late-90s gems *The Chemicals Between Us*, *Letting The Cables Sleep* shake off the vestiges of grunge, adding electronics and sawing strings to the mix. And if the band's more recent albums mostly get shorter shrift here, that's not to detract from the quality of the material. With 21 songs, including new song *Nowhere To Go But Everywhere* and an unnecessary cover of The Beatles' already overdone *Come Together*, it's a great primer for a band who eventually proved their worth.

Dave Everley

Superchunk

Misfits & Mistakes *MERGE*

Four-vinyl/two-CD box set collecting singles, B-sides and more from the alt.punk rockers.

Released to coincide with the band's UK/European tour this month, *Misfits & Mistakes* includes no less than 50 tracks from Superchunk's back catalogue, which naturally falls into the file marked 'rare and previously unreleased'. However, if you haven't heard unrare and previously released Superchunk, then *No Pocky For Kitty*, their Steve Albini-produced second album from 1991, is the best example of their melodic alt. rock/punk influenced by Hüsker Dü and The Replacements.

Formed in 1989 and surviving both the grunge and melodic punk explosions of the early 90s, Superchunk took their cues from DIY punk and formed Merge Records to release their self-titled debut and all subsequent recordings. As this box set proves, they've stuck to

GEORGE BODNAR/PRESS

their guns for the past 30 years by rising above ephemeral genre fads. Ultimately a completist's set, it even includes – what seems to be quite the zeitgeist if the Duranies are anything to go by – covers of 80s pop such as Bananarama's *Cruel Summer* and The Cure's *In Between Days*.

Alex Burrows

W.A.S.P.

The 7 Savage 1984 – 1992

MADFISH

A Blackie bonanza.

To this day, it's a mystery what the initials 'W.A.S.P.' stand for. (Blackie Lawless once memorably – and evasively – said: "We Ain't Sure, Pal"). But we might've cracked it, at least in the context of this vinyl box set. Because what we have here is a Wallet-Alleviating Selection of Platters.

The 7 Savage spans W.A.S.P.'s Capitol Records years and offers five studio albums, *Live... In The Raw*, bonus tracks and paraphernalia aplenty. It retails for £200-250; surely some fillet steak should've been thrown in for good measure?

The sonics have been remastered at half speed, which sounds like t-o-o-o-r-t-u-u-u-r-e for studio personnel. Still, the results are as crisp as a piece of frozen cod, or indeed a frozen codpiece. It's a shame W.A.S.P. went all conceptual on later LPs *The Crimson Idol* and, to a lesser extent, *The Headless Children*, cos no one writes a marauding-but-melodious sleazebag of a song quite like Lawless.

The best stuff is on their early albums (*W.A.S.P.* and *The Last Command*), when Blackie was in his creepy, lascivious, bloodlustin' prime. Defining anthem *Animal (Fuck Like A Beast)* is relegated to bonus-track status, but provides a Wickedly Anthemic Sucker Punch.

Geoff Barton

Christine McVie

Reissues WMG

Fleetwood Mac grand dame steps out.

Almost everyone in a rock group will have experienced that moment when being in a band isn't enough and nothing will do and they must record a solo project. But when members of even the most enormously successful bands release solo records, their expectations must often be low in commercial terms (even Mick Jagger, singer with the most famous band of several eras, struggled with success on his own terms). Which is possibly why such projects are often best left to the 'quiet one' in a band; one thinks of George Harrison's increasingly sardonic solo albums. And, perhaps, best of all, Christine McVie's work. Her visibility in Fleetwood Mac was often obscured by that of Nicks and Buckingham, but her talent as a vocalist and songwriter was often greater.

These two newly remastered albums (*Christine McVie* from 1984, *In The Meantime* from 2004) flow seamlessly from one to the other, as if recorded 20 hours apart not 20 years, and are full of brilliant songs carried along by a great voice and a sense of calm. *Easy Come, Easy Go*, one is called, but there are years of wisdom and song-writing experience here.

Both

David Quantick

Bernie Tormé

Lightning Strikes: 1982 – 1983 CHERRY RED

Witness the birth of a semi-legend.

If the teeming masses know anything about the career of the late Irish guitarist Bernie Tormé, it's usually as a footnote in Ozzy's history, when he briefly replaced the then recently deceased Randy Rhoads on tour. That was a minor blip on an expansive, adventuresome career, however, which spanned everything from a four-album stint with Gillan to playing crunchy glam-metal with Dee Snider in Desperado and in the humbly titled band Tormé.

This box set fills in more of the story, with two early solo records that are ripe for rediscovery. His sound is a sticky tangle of psychedelic barrage, rock'n'roll swagger and heavy metal finesse, clearly influenced by Hendrix, but with equal enthusiasm for punkier players like Johnny Thunders. *Turn Out the Lights* (1982) and *Electric Gypsies* (1983) are both remarkable albums in their seamless synthesis of these seemingly disparate elements. *Lights* is full of speedy bluster, from the sneering *Lies* to the Dollsy strut of *Painter Man*. *Electric Gypsies* is arguably Tormé's finest hour, a near-flawless combination of sleazy rock'n'roll and shameless guitar heroics. The box set is topped off with two discs of previously unreleased gems and live tracks.

A fantastic entry point to Tormé's deep well of music.

Sleazegrinder

Devo

50 Years Of De-evolution

RHINO

Q: Are they not men? A: Yes, and they are Devo!

You never quite know with band farewells, of course, but Devo's summer tour seemed to mark the end of half a century of mischief, innovation, frequent greatness and a lingering sense of potential never quite fully fulfilled.

For a band who never lost the capacity to surprise, there are few surprises in this collection, beyond a 1974 demo of *I'm A Potato* and assorted single mixes. Even so, these 50 tracks are their story. All nine studio albums are covered, although the sequencing defies logic. Their late classic *Smooth Noodle Maps* is under-represented, and losing anything from the wondrous debut *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!* Is cutting off a musical limb.

That first clutch of songs were, like Kraftwerk or Led Zeppelin, music from another planet. Devo cooked with familiar ingredients, from the coldness of *Station To Station* to the quirkiness of the Merry Pranksters via the subversion of MC5. Yet nobody had blended those ingredients quite like this, be it a version of *Satisfaction* still like no other, the uncomfortable but irresistibly catchy *Mongoloid* or their self-referencing signature *Jocko Homo*.

From there they embraced electro, especially Krautrock on *Smart Patrol*, but they were immune to trends. *What We Do*, from 2010's *Something For Everybody*, is a reminder that they lost some of their individuality but never their golden touch. It would be their last album, and once Bob Casale's heart gave way in 2014 these post-post-modernists lost the impetus to make new music. Remember them this way.

John Aizlewood

BEST OF THE REST

Other reissues out this month.

Earth

Earth 2 (Special Low Frequency Version) SUB POP EARTH

A drone/ambient metal landmark, but if you're not the kind of punter who can hold fast for 73 fruitless minutes waiting for the drums to kick in, possibly not your thing. As for those Special Low Frequencies, I'm relieved to report that I didn't involuntarily soil myself once. **7/10**

McDonald And Giles

McDonald And Giles PANEGYRIC

Often overlooked as inessential post-King Crimson Mk1 detritus, this sole recording from multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald and the Giles brothers Michael (drums) and Peter (bass) is as ambitious and imaginative a piece of pastoral soft prog as you'll ever hear. **9/10**

The Move

Shazam! Remastered Vinyl ESOTERIC

Occupying the ever-fertile cusp between 60s psych and 70s prog, this peculiarly English second LP from one of the era's least applauded combos is unequivocally worth another listen. Schizophrenic, genre-free, mad, brilliant, the sound of Roy Wood's head exploding. **8/10**

Various

Blank Generation US/Canadian Punk 1975-1981 CHERRY RED

If you've not got *Chinese Rocks, Sonic Reducer, Rockaway Beach* or *Holiday In Cambodia* or heard Patti Smith, Television or The Cramps, this cannily curated five-disc set will change your life, but if you're not Rip Van Winkle it probably won't. That said, it's still brilliant. **8/10**

Busted

Greatest Hits 2.0

Time being what it is, Busted doing *Teenage Kicks* on the Brits feels like last week. Guess again. In February it'll be 20 years ago. And you're old. Facts? Busted had four pop-punk number ones, this is a double, McFly guest on it, and you're still old. Hell, even *they're* old. **7/10**

New Order

Substance 1987 (Remastered) WARNER

Whether handsomely expanded to four CDs (with additional mixes and an '87 live set), spread over two LP red/blue vinyls or condemned to double cassette, this stunning chronicle of New Order's reinvention of indie, EDM and pop, across six years and 14 singles, is hard to fault. **8/10**

Arthur Brown

Dance ESOTERIC

A mainstream-targetted (Moog-heavy proto-disco) album that – in '74 – seemed to mark the ex-God Of Hellfire's exit from the psych underground, this expanded (by six live tracks) set proves that just because you can shriek in tune doesn't necessarily mean that you should. **6/10**

Oasis

The Masterplan BIG BROTHER

For some, hating Oasis is a badge of honour, akin to discernment. Though it's hard to see it as anything other than gratuitous snobbery when faced with this extraordinary collection of B-sides. *Some Might Say*'s flip, *Acquiese*, could well have won them the battle of Britpop. **8/10**

Prince & The New Power Generation

Diamonds & Pearls PAISLEY PARK/SONY/WARNER

Featuring both *Cream* and *Gett Off*, *D&P* captures Prince at his most priapic. A bold claim, but with a title tune that leaves Marvin Gaye's seduction technique looking like Roy Cropper's it's quite the lech fest. Now up to seven discs with live set, it's even harder to resist. **8/10**

Richard Hawley

Now Then: The Best Of BMG

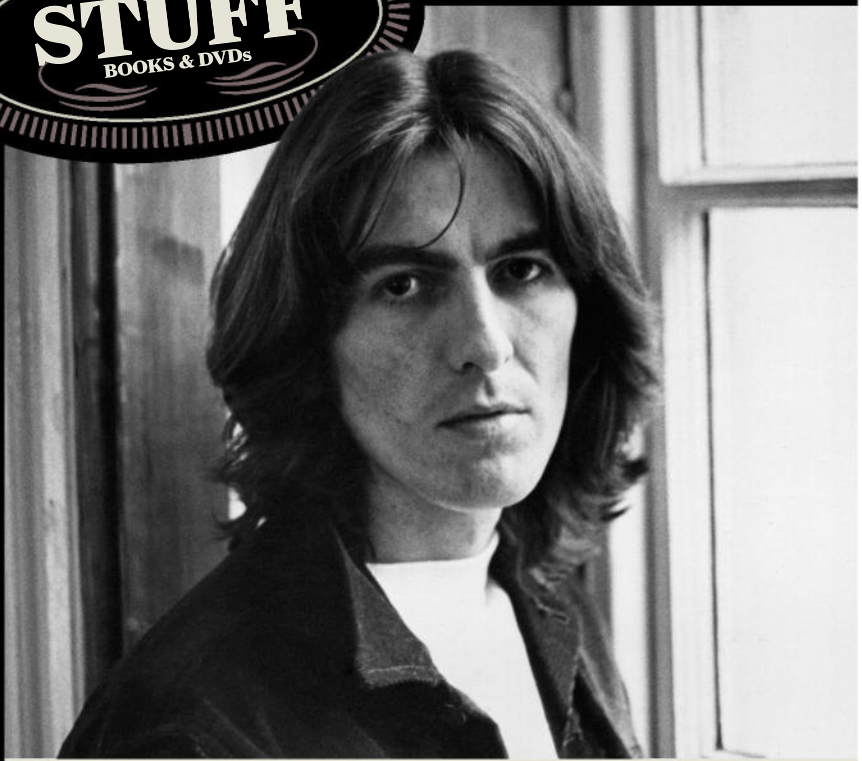
There's something of the over-mannered Neil Hannon croon about Brill Building/rockabilly-literate ex-Longpigs/Pulp guitarist Hawley, but when he goes full throttle (*She Brings The Sunlight, Off My Mind*) all's forgiven. Two CDs of flawless arrangements and exemplary tones. **7/10**

BEST OF THE REST REVIEWS BY IAN FORTNAM

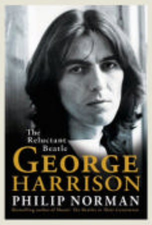
THE HARD STUFF

STUFF

BOOKS & DVDs



George Harrison: The Reluctant Beatle



Philip Norman SIMON & SCHUSTER

It's been so long, my Lord.

The venerable Philip Norman has already written three Fab books – *Shout!: The Beatles In Their Generation* (Paul McCartney described it as "shite"), *John Lennon: A Life*, and *Paul McCartney The Biography* – so he has every right to use his own source of material as the basis for the first few hundred pages of his new George Harrison tome, even if the recycling often leads the reader to think: "I know that" or "I've read all this before".

It's not difficult to accept the titular premise (makes a change from 'The Quiet One'), although by the time we reach The Beatles' unsavoury demise you could argue that all four of them felt the same (maybe not so much Ringo Starr). Given that Norman is by necessity running out of new people to provide reminiscence, it's fortunate that Harrison's first wife Pattie Boyd stepped up to the plate to good-naturedly report on her husband's philandering, including a mucky dalliance with Ringo's wife Maureen, which Lennon called "incest". Her even-handed contributions also alleviate those many spells where George's spirituality wanders off the rails.

Norman's initial account of Harrison's childhood is dutiful, although (as is often the case with a Beatles book) you're overloaded with what seems like an endless bus ride accompanied by a Liverpool A-Z, by which time you don't know your Speke from your West Derby. All the Cavern club material is well handled, including the oft-quoted but still droll Harrison moment when he spots his future manager in the audience: "And what brings Mr Epstein here?" The wry wisecracking Harrison is easier to love than the prematurely bad-tempered grouch he could be, but that's forgivable given the price The Beatles paid for their absurd fame, enough to drive anyone to Courvoisier and cocaine.

What cannot be overlooked are the passages of repeated and revisited descriptions, often within a few pages of each other, suggesting this book has been edited with the utmost reluctance, if at all. Describing Don McLean as "the Canadian songwriter" (hello Wiki) is farcical, and there's a tortuously confused reference to the not-yet- purchased Friar Park being mistaken for Apple HQ that should have been spotted to save everyone's blushes.

On the plus side, Harrison's songs, within and without Beatledom, are adequately considered, Friar Park is illuminated by the author, and Harrison's unbearably sad demise is dealt with a sensitive hand. A shorter examination of this Dark Horse and working class-hero would have been a better idea.

Max Bell

Bob Dylan: Mixing Up The Medicine

Mark Davidson and Parker Fishel CALLAWAY

Still rolling Bob? You bet.

There are already more books about Dylan than any other rock'n'roll artist, but this 600-page tome marks the start of a new genre, drawing on the rapidly expanding Bob Dylan Archive in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where its authors Davidson and Fishel are curator and co-curator respectively.

Given the wealth of material at their disposal, they can afford to be expansive and enlightened in their approach, leaving others to follow with deeper analyses of the myriad draft lyrics, manuscripts and transcriptions that show up on torn-out pages of exercise books, notebooks, hotel stationery and bank-deposit slips.

Not that there isn't a bit of that here among the many essays the writers have commissioned, including one on *Handy Dandy* from *Under The Red Sky* that suggests another Dylan alter ego. But even there the tone is kept light, leaving you free to soak up the revelations at the rate of about one a page.

Hugh Fielder

Jean-Jacques Burnel: Strangler In The Light

Anthony Boile COURSEGOOD

Twelve conversations with the Stranglers bassist – and much better than it sounds.

Translated transcriptions of 12 chats between a French writer and a 71-year-old bassist is hardly something to set anyone's pulse racing. But with each conversation covering a different topic beginning with 'M', from Music to Masturbation, and Burnel in unusually revealing mood, it's quite the treat.

The result is a part-autobiography (there's a beautiful moment when, near to death, Burnel's elderly father watches JJ's mother pass by and declares: "I made the right choice"), the finest book about The Stranglers, and some splendidly bonkers opinions: "Big industry was controlled by people being paid for by Moscow," he notes of 70s Britain and their 'let's take heroin for a year' experiment. There's sex, divorce ("the court granted her everything I'd earned for 30 years"), and the last word on Hugh Cornwell: "I do feel a bit sorry for him… he must be even more bitter now… he's touring toilets around England".

John Aizlewood

The Who And Quadrophenia

Martin Popoff MOTORBOOKS

Townshend's mod masterwork revisited.

By 1973, The Who were in effect an American group, geared towards touring stadiums. Jaded by "pounding stages like a clown" and tethered by the success of *Tommy*, Pete Townshend came up with *Quadrophenia*, the story of a young mod with double schizophrenia, set in the streets of London and Brighton where the band began their journey to superstardom.

The tale of how the album was made will be familiar to Who fans: using Ronnie Lane's mobile studio while their own Ramport was under construction; Townshend setting sail on the river to tape seagulls; the intra-band punch-ups; recruiting local teenagers to be photographed for the story booklet.

Author Martin Popoff provides track-by-track analysis and post-album legacy covering The Jam, the '79 mod revival and Britpop. Overall it's a nifty package, but it does contain a few clangers: The Who's home patch, Acton, is not in East London; and what, pray tell, is a "crumpet of wisdom"?

Claudia Elliott

Queen Uncovered

Peter Hince WELBECK PUBLISHING

Roadie's behind-the-scenes shots from his time with Freddie and co. in their prime.

There can't have been that many roadies in the 70s who constantly had a decent camera with them, but Peter 'Ratty' Hince must be pretty chuffed that he was one who did.

His work looking after Freddie Mercury and John Deacon throughout Queen's peak years not only gave him the chance to take some candid snaps, it also provided him with a few tales to tell – from his car crash with Mercury, to being greeted by him

GETTY

in his bathrobe, still dripping, and demanding to be driven to the studio as he'd just written *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*.

After a while many sound-check photos begin to merge into one, but there's no shortage of nuggets for hard-core Queenophiles to sift from the pile of backstage laminates with fat-bottomed girls on them.

Johnny Sharp

Police Diaries 1976-79

Stewart Copeland ROCKET 88

Illustrated account of Police drummer's pre-stardom pop life.

Subtitled *1976-79* (aka 'The Starving Years'), Stewart Copeland's memoir is a witty look back at the earliest years of a musical career spanning 50 years. Making full use of diaries that document his day-to-day activities, it pinpoints the exact moment his destiny was sealed: seeing local band Last Exit, featuring Sting, while on tour with Curved Air in Newcastle on September 25, 1976.

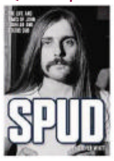
The device also allows Copeland – an avid student of the zeitgeist – to catalogue cultural shifts in real time, notably when a party in honour of Al Stewart is gatecrashed by an unruly Sex Pistols in the week of their notorious appearance on the *Today* programme. "These kids were an insult to everything my band stood for," he writes. "But dang! I felt like I was on their side."

Paul Moody

Spud: The Life And Times Of John Coghlan And Status Quo

Steven Myatt JOHNCOGHLAN.COM

All you needed to know about Quo's 'quiet man', and more.



Not to be confused with a previous biography written by Steven Myett in 2004, this beefy, 120,000-word, 252-page A4 tome revises and updates the tale of the man who was Status Quo's drummer from 1963 to 1981 to include two reunion tours.

Although its time line is drunker than Coghlan after 15 pints of his beloved Farmer's Best Bitter, and with gremlins so abundant that I stopped jotting them down (Ian Page of Deep Purple, Band Aid instead of Live Aid?), the author's affection for his subject is unmistakable. Detailing the highs and lows of Coghlan's career, Myatt dives into the murkiness of Quo's heyday finances, revealing that, naively, Coghlan hired a divorce lawyer to negotiate his exit, but there's a real sense of joy as the Frantic Four bury their differences to perform again.

Spud is a very decent book, although involvement of a fact checker and sub-editor would have made it a whole lot better.

Dave Ling

My Effin' Life

Geddy Lee HARPERCOLLINS

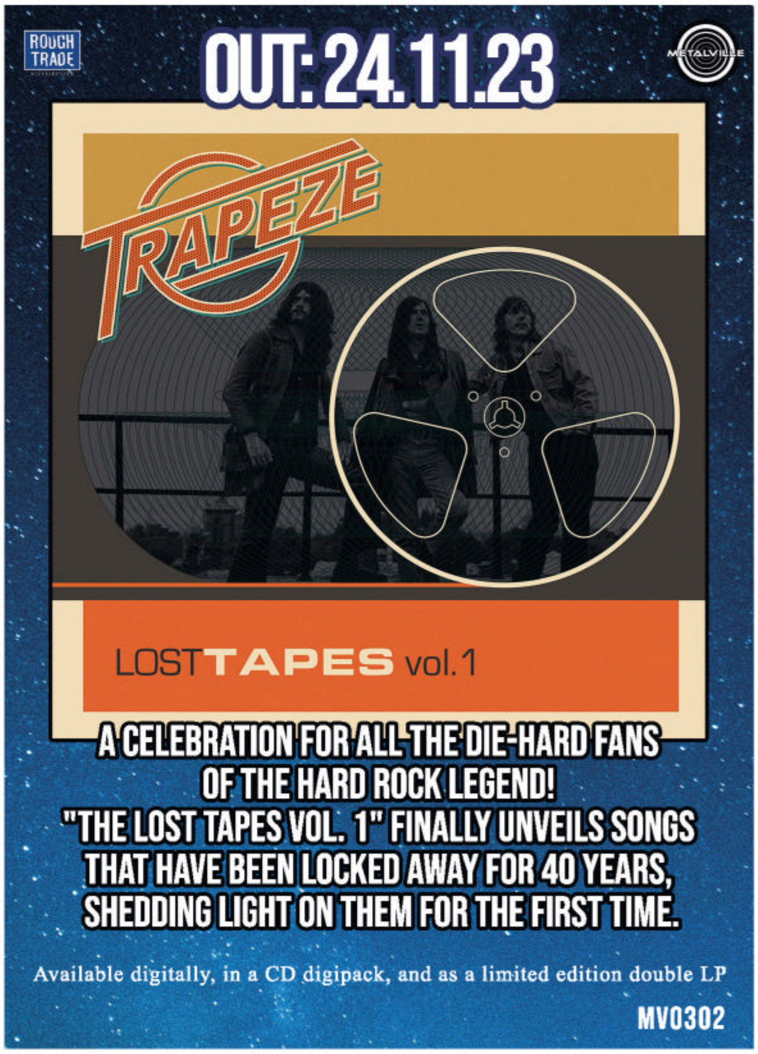
Candid, surprisingly eye-popping memoir from the Rush frontman.

Drugs, intra-band turmoil, relationship strife, death… You'd be forgiven for thinking that was describing a follow-up to Mötley Crüe's *The Dirt*. But riffle through the pages of Rush bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee's at times jaw-dropping autobiography and each page is more surprising than the last.

That said, Lee has the strength of purpose to veer from the expected path of the usual rock-star autobiography (how very Rush), and commit the second chapter of his book to the rise of fascism that saw both his parents incarcerated in the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp. It's a brave and important step, and sets the course for a book, as with his life, that veers from dizzying highs – platinum records, sold-out arena shows – to very human lows: cocaine abuse; his fractured marriage; alienating guitarist Alex Lifeson to the point that he nearly quit the band; the long, drawn out loss of Rush drummer/lyricist Neil Peart. But regardless, Lee's voice shines through, his prose sharp and acute.

Much like the band he fronted for decades, there are lefts here that feel right, unexpected interludes (although nothing in 13/8 time, thankfully) and a remarkable peek behind the curtain from this very private man. The book also ends on a surprising, ringing and promising high, but we'll let you discover that gem for yourself.

Philip Wilding



Clutch in 1996: as unique as they are unpredictable.

Clutch

Since emerging from the DC scenes of punk, funk and go-go, the band have united the rock nation under their groove.

When a band comes along and knocks you on your ass, blind-siding you with a wholly unexpected journey, it's hard not to take notice. With a prolific studio output and a legendary live reputation, Clutch are as unique as they are unpredictable, a true rock'n'roll unicorn. Since their inception in 1991, the Maryland four-piece have ushered their burgeoning congregation through a multiverse of experiences, emerging as pioneering advocates of good times and big grooves. With elements of hardcore, country, rock, blues and other vibes, Clutch have danced their merry jig across the globe for over 30 years now, and it doesn't look like the pace will be slowing any time soon.

Growing up in Maryland, they soaked up everything that the nearby DC scene would throw at them. From Fugazi to the legendary go-go rhythms of Trouble Funk, the variety of influences came thick and fast. The hardcore scene injected a fire within them, but it was the funk that made them who they are today. "That feeling of groove, I hear that all the time when we're playing," Clutch's drummer Jean-Paul Gaster told *Classic Rock*'s Dave Everley. "Big beats and big sounds. That's what I'm thinking when I'm playing. I'm thinking go-go."

With fans and loyalists popping up from all areas of the rock and metal spectrum, Clutch are hard to hate. They've shared the spotlight with Slayer, Tool, Motörhead, Marilyn Manson, Dinosaur Jr, Mastodon, System Of A Down and Helmet, to name just a few – solid evidence that trying to fit them into a neat box is a fruitless exercise. And the joyous rhythms that permeate every live show flow directly into their studio recordings, making it hard not to want to move and dance. They exude the aura of a band truly comfortable and confident both in the studio and on stage.

Preacher, shaman, ringmaster; all have been used to describe Clutch's frontman Neil Fallon, who oozes charisma like Clutch's music radiates serotonin, syrupy and hearty; Clutch's music fills you up. With Gaster on drums and Dan Maines on bass, they have a rhythm section for the ages, saturated with weight and feeling. And Tim Sult's avant-garde guitar musings have him ranked with other sonic six-string pioneers such as Tom Morello.

Together, the four are a tour de force. On stage they are peerless. As their 2015 track *Earth Rocker* preaches: *'If you're going to do it, do it live on stage, or don't do it at all.'* Amen to that.

James Isaacs

Essential Classics

Clutch

EAST WEST, 1995

At the height of their cosmic surrealism and sonic Americana road trip, the self-titled milestone showed Clutch angle-grinding the rough edges off their sound, and a smoother, more confident band came to the fore. Bringing a lighter touch into the mix, with this album Clutch began to blend their heavier leanings with a groovier, funkier flavour, and the next stage of their evolution began.

It's an undeniable 'no skipper' of an album, with *Big News 1 & 2*, *Spacegrass*, *Texan Book Of The Dead* and *Tight Like That* the prime cuts from a record that is still revered by Clutch aficionados as something akin to a religious relic.

Blast Tyrant

DRT ENTERTAINMENT, 2004

Signalling a new era for Clutch as they headed, pedal-down, into a bluesier, more grounded sound, *Blast Tyrant* put them into new conversations. It's seen by many as their greatest achievement, and it's hard to disagree, with the number of dance-floor favourites and live regulars on show. Spearheaded by the frenzied stomp of *Mob Goes Wild* and the wah-wah fest that is *Profits Of Doom*, the album also shone a light on Clutch's more delicate affectations with *The Regulator*, a finger-picking firework that explodes with 10-ton choruses. *Blast Tyrant* saw Clutch flexing their muscles, announcing their intent to take their show to the big stage.

Superior Reputation cementing

Elephant Riders

COLUMBIA, 1998

Probably the band's last sojourn through the cosmos, as their love of surrealist space-jams started to wane soon after and Clutch evolved into their next form. But on this record their imagination ran wild as they continued to push the boundary lines outwards, redefining what could be considered heavy rock music. *Ship Of Gold* and *Eight Times Over Miss October* roll along like storm clouds, a swirling duo of dirty riffs and crackling tones, and *The Dragonfly* is the perfect full stop. There are no real standouts, just an amorphous collection of tones and vibes, culminating in what appears to be a concept-free concept album.

Robot Hive / Exodus

DRT ENTERTAINMENT, 2005

Along with *Blast Tyrant*, this period of Clutch's discography is an unblemished gold mine of musical prowess. It's hard to find fault when you have a tracklist that includes *10001110101, Burning Beard* and *Mice & Gods.* But even without those stone-cold classics in mind, the album hardly puts a step wrong, and the inclusion of the cosmic Hammond organ of Mick Schauer only gave Clutch more depth and plumped up their sound. *Never Be Moved* should be up there in Clutch's Hall Of Fame, but when there are so many prime cuts, room at the top table is hard to come by.

From Beale Street To Oblivion

DRT ENTERTAINMENT, 2007

Not an obvious choice for such praise but Beale Street contains a vast array of sleeping giants often overshadowed by their more popular siblings and premium live favourites. *Electric Worry* is the star of the show, a constant inclusion at Clutch gigs and for good reason, as it is by far the greatest amalgamation of the band's finest traits: groove, intensity and the ability to get any audience moving. But behind that one showstopper stands a multitude of gems like *Child Of The City Opposum Minister* and *Black Umbrella*, incredible tunes most likely never to see a stage.

Pure Rock Fury

ATLANTIC, 2001

Sitting between the jagged hardcore scene and trippy space-rock vibes, *Pure Rock Fury* existed as an isolated island, signalling Clutch's only real foray into a more 'metal'-sounding production. Even the rap-based standout *Careful With That Mic,* bursting with rough edges and sonic grit, sounds like it was recorded in a swamp. No surprises, then, that riff wizards Leslie West and Scott 'Wino' Weinrich make some wonderful cameos, solidifying this as one of Clutch's statement albums, occasionally butting heads with the rest of the discography. It's an uncompromising and vital chapter in the band's evolution.

Good Worth exploring

Transnational Speedway League

EAST WEST, 1993

Clutch's debut full length album turned heads and rattled cages at a time when rock and metal were in a period of transition, with grunge becoming the MTV-friendly figurehead of the scene. So Clutch's heaviest album to date became a sanctuary for people looking for a fresh sound.

At the time, *Metal Hammer*'s Morat succinctly described *Transnational Speedway League* as "a stark reminder of just how good angry music could sound"; lead-off single *A Shogun Called Marcus* caused havoc at the band's shows. The album tails off slightly, but the embryo of something special is clear as day.

Earth Rocker

WEATHERMAKER MUSIC, 2013

Produced by Machine and coming off the back of tours with Motörhead and Thin Lizzy, it came as no surprise that Clutch's tenth album arrived with a little extra gas in the tank.

Hitting the ground with smoking tyres, the opening tracks *Earth Rocker, Crucial Velocity, Mr. Freedom* and *D.C. Sound Attack* get things going at an unrelenting pace, giving the back straight of tunes a slightly pedestrian feel by comparison. It's not uncommon for Clutch to adopt a bilateral approach to building albums, often stating that need for a classic 'Side A/Side B' LP feel. But overall *Earth Rocker* still feels a touch top-heavy.

Psychic Warfare

WEATHERMAKER MUSIC, 2015

Following up on the pedal-down pace of previous album *Earth Rocker, Psychic Warfare* kept the momentum rolling, with juiced-up highlights such as *Firebirds* and *Sucker For The Witch.* They even brought a touch of Cold War espionage to the mix with the wondrously surreal and sci-fi tinted *X-Ray Visions*, showing the band's constant ability to mix tongue-in-cheek humour with big beats. *Your Love Is Incarceration* is by far one of Clutch's best-kept secrets, a dirty alternative to the band's addiction to funk and groove. *Doom Saloon* and *Son Of Virginia* bring a lighter, grittier touch that really helps to even out the album.

Avoid

Jam Room

RIVER ROAD, 1999

Clutch don't make 'bad' albums. Period. But *Jam Room* has always been the runt of the litter; a little scruffy and not much meat on its bones. A solid seven out of 10 by any standard, but Clutch's bar is set so high it stands out from its stockier, more robust kin. *Big Fat Pig* has riffs for days, and *Raised By Horses* and *Gnome Enthusiast*, although sounding a little unpolished, keep the knee-slapping stomp going at a heady pace. The star is opener *Who Wants To Rock,* and if a more perfect way to open a live show exists then I've yet to see it. *'What you need you know I got, so hands up who wants rock?'* Fallon bellows, and the audience always answers with a sea of hands.

Essential Playlist

Big News I & II
Clutch

Your Love Is Incarceration
Psychic Warfare

Never Be Moved
Robot Hive/Exodus

Crucial Velocity
Earth Rocker

Tight Like That
Clutch

The Regulator
Blast Tyrant

Electric Worry
From Beale Street To Oblivion

A Shogun Named Marcus
Transnational Speedway League

Cypress Grove
Blast Tyrant

Careful With That Mic
Pure Rock Fury

Mob Goes Wild
Blast Tyrant

Earth Rocker
Earth Rocker

10001110101
Robot Hive/Exodus

50,000 Unstoppable Watts
Strange Cousins From The West

We Strive For Excellence
Sunrise On Slaughter Beach

Who Wants To Rock
Jam Room

One Eye Dollar
From Beale Street To Oblivion

Hot Bottom Feeder
Book Of Bad Decisions

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WED 13 LONDON ISLINGTON O2 ACADEMY2
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GLASGOW QUEEN MARGARET UNION | DECEMBER 9
SUNDERLAND FIRE STATION | DECEMBER 10
BURY ST ED THE APEX | DECEMBER 14
MANCHESTER ACADEMY | DECEMBER 15
DECEMBER 16 | LYTHAM LOWTHER PAVILION
DECEMBER 17 | CARDIFF TRAMSHED
DECEMBER 20 | NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
DECEMBER 21 | LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL
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2024
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26 APR MANCHESTER - ACADEMY 3
27 APR GLASGOW - ORAN MOR
28 APR NEWCASTLE - ANARCHY BREW CO
02 MAY NOTTINGHAM - RESCUE ROOMS
03 MAY SOUTHAMPTON - 1865
04 MAY WOLVES - KK STEEL MILL
05 MAY NORWICH - WATERFRONT STUDIO
08 MAY BRISTOL - LOST HORIZON
09 MAY NEWBURY - ARLINGTON ARTS
10 MAY LONDON - UNDERWORLD
11 MAY STOKE - UNDERGROUND

LIVE!

The High-Voltage What's On Guide

Edited By Ian Fortnam (Reviews) and Dave Ling (Tours)

P100

AC/DC

85,000 get thunderstruck in the California desert.

KEVIN MAZUR / GETTY

P92 Interviews
P97 tour dates
P100 Live Reviews

"It will be a good selection from the first four albums, though a couple from album five have also been floating around."

The Almighty

The original line-up gear up to play their first shows in more than 30 years.

Guitarist and frontman Ricky Warwick and drummer Stumpy Monroe set the scene for Act Four in the band's long, on-off career, with three shows in November and December.

These three dates, which mark thirty-two years since the original line-up of The Almighty last played together, are now eleven weeks away.
Monroe: Aye, they're screaming towards us. Tomorrow Floyd [London, bassist] is coming over to put me through my paces.

It had been a long time since you played drums, Stumpy. How is the prep going?
After nigh-on fifteen years away I've eased myself in gently, taking half an hour or forty-five minutes whenever I can. I'm struggling with [the song] *Powertrippin'*, but it's slowly coming together.

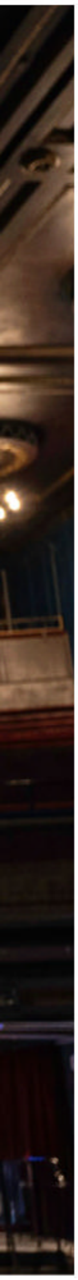
Why did it have to be this line-up of the band for these shows?
Warwick: Much as we love Pete [Friesen, the Canadian guitarist who had two spells with the band] and he remains part of the family, it needed to be the originals. It was only announced in January, but Stump and I have been talking about this for more than two years. Covid and the old cliché about life being too short were what convinced us. We've lost so many people from around the band, in the end we said: "Yeah, let's do this.".

And if Pete turns up with his guitar he can play a song or two?
Warwick: Absolutely. He'd be more than welcome.

Will you be playing a 'best-of'-style set?
Monroe: It will be a good selection from the first four albums, though a couple from album five [*Just Add Life*, 1996] have also been floating around. We'll have to see how they fit into the set-list.
Warwick: *Powertrippin'* and *Crank* [the third and fourth studio albums, from 1993 and '94] were big albums for us, and we'll include some stuff from those, but the first two [*Blood, Fire & Love* from 1989 and 1991's *Soul Destruction*] introduced the band and are seminal.

It sounds like they will be quite lengthy shows.
Monroe: Too bloody long, if you ask me [both laugh]. Looking at the set-list, it could be an hour and forty-five minutes.
Warwick: Probably a bit more than that, I think.
Monroe: It's a lot for a bunch of old men. But remember, when The Wildhearts were in their twenties they'd only do forty-five minutes.

KEVIN NIXON



Ticket sales have been strong, with Manchester the only one yet to sell out.
Warwick: Manchester is very close now, just a few tickets remain, and the other two [Glasgow and London] sold out very quickly, which was amazing.
Monroe: Glasgow went in a day, and London wasn't far behind. I'm told that we've sold more tickets in Manchester than we did at our peak.

How does that make you feel?
Monroe: Nervous. And honoured. We are close to selling seven thousand tickets, which is quite a feat.

What's interesting is that there will be people at these shows who have never seen The Almighty before, let alone the original band.
Monroe: With so many tickets sold, that will probably be the case. There must be those that got into us via their older brother's records, and if we can turn their heads that's even better.
Warwick: Floyd tells me that his kids never experienced the band, so he'll be bringing them to show them what their dad used to do.
Monroe: I've never seen them either.
Warwick [laughing] The Almighty, or Floyd's kids?
Monroe: The Almighty. All I've ever seen is the back of your head.

Why did you pick Balaam & The Angel as special guests for these dates?
Warwick: We've known them for so long. We used to play with them at the Marquee [in London], they're a great band and obviously there's a Scottish connection with the brothers [Mark, Jim and Des Morris are originally from Motherwell].
Monroe: We could have got a new, up-and-coming band, but most of our audience probably wouldn't connect with that.
Warwick: The Almighty were always more than just a metal band, so stylistically it's a good fit.

Product-wise, will there be anything new to mark the reunion?
Warwick: Yeah. We are re-releasing the first two albums on vinyl and a special gatefold limited-edition on vinyl.

From the first announcement, it was made clear that the group had no intention of recording what would be the first new album since *Psycho-Narco* in 2001. But if the gigs go spectacularly well would you reconsider?
Warwick: I'll go with 'never say never'. Sorry if it's cheesy, but we've all got so much going on in our lives at the moment that I really can't look past the first show.

Do The Almighty still have anything left to prove?
Warwick: I think we already did that, with the number of tickets we've sold.

We ask because in the past certain critics dismissed the band as bandwagon jumpers.
Warwick: I'm very proud that we were always a formidable live band, but right from the start Stump and I knew that we wouldn't make the same album ten times over. That's okay for some bands, but not for The Almighty. Our air of unpredictability was something I always liked about us. **DL**

The tour kicks off in Glasgow on November 30.

SANTINI LUCIO/PRESS

Uli Jon Roth

Expect "a 'best of' show", with the addition of some new songs.

After dealing with some health issues, the former Scorpions guitarist previews nine rare UK performances.

In May you had a kidney removed, forcing the postponement of a US tour. How are you feeling?
I'm okay, thanks. That was four months ago. The surgery healed well and I'm feeling fine.

Incredibly, you appeared as a special guest of Saxon at a festival in Sweden in the summer.
Within a month, yeah. It sounds foolish, but after seven days I was recording in the studio. People told me I looked like death warmed up, but I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it.

So obviously you expect to be well enough for these nine shows in ten days in November?
It'll be fine. After the WinterStorm Festival [in Scotland on November 24] I have a day off. The doctors are absolutely okay with that. This summer I did nine festivals in various counties, and I feel very, very well.

What kind of a show are you planning?
It's a kind of 'best of' show, it will be colourful. There will be a lot of Scorpions songs, also some songs by [Roth's post-Scorpions band] Electric Sun, including a couple that we haven't played before, and some new pieces. I play one song with my nine-string Flamenco Sky guitar.

Apart from having nine strings, how else does the Sky guitar differ from a regular guitar?
There are quite a few differences. They enable me to do a lot of things that otherwise are impossible. Because they have extra frets, they bring a lot of extra register. Even in Scorpions days I sometimes ran out of frets because I wanted to play higher.

Will it be a long show?
All of my shows are kind of on the long side [laughs]. Probably around two hours, with a lot of improvisation during the encore. I like there to be a little – quote-unquote – danger on stage. It keeps things interesting.

What can you tell us about the new album that you are recording?
I'm making it at Dierks Studio in Cologne. I've reconnected with Dieter Dierks, the old producer of the Scorpions. I will play a couple of the new songs during the tour.

Is it a rock album?
My albums are a little hard to define. It's a rock album, but it also has some acoustic pieces with Flamenco guitar. The music I write now is a hybrid. I don't know where one genre starts or ends, they are very much intermingled.

We'll hear the results via your new record label, Alpha Experium.
For years I didn't take much interest in my releases. I didn't even know some of them were out of print. So it was time to show my catalogue some respect. The first to be re-released is *Earthquake* [by Electric Sun, from 1979], the first one I made after leaving the Scorpions. It has new artwork and has been remastered to recapture the original sound.

Earlier this year your five albums with the Scorpions were re-released. What memories do you have of that period from 1973 to 1978?
Those were great times. The comradeship grew as the band improved, and we made quantum leaps with each album. When I left it was because I knew there was no place for the songs that became *Earthquake*. It wasn't as commercial as the Scorpions, but although Electric Sun was an 'outsider' band, we played Hammersmith Odeon twice, so I like to think we did pretty well. **DL**

Roth's tour begins in Cardiff on November 30.

"Of course the audience want to hear *Ace Of Spades* and a couple of other classics, but most of the set is original material."

Phil Campbell & The Bastard Sons

The former Motörhead guitarist and his band make some noise in November and December.

Phil Campbell gives us the lowdown on touring with a band that includes his three sons, quitting the booze, and why you just can't beat having a good afternoon nap.

In some ways, after Lemmy passed away you entered a classic no-win situation: venture too close to Motörhead territory and the fans would shoot you down, but go the other way and the same thing happens.
For about four months [after Motörhead broke up] I didn't know what to do. I was so exhausted I considered retiring completely. But my eldest boy, Todd, had a thirtieth birthday party in Cardiff, there was a live band we got up and jammed some covers, and it felt so good we carried on. In fact the party was two years before Lem passed away, but it was the start of the Bastard Sons.

The new album, *Kings Of The Asylum*, is the most effective mix of old and new.
It's definitely the best one that we've done. Of course it was going to sound a bit like Motörhead – I was the main guy that wrote all of those riffs – but after three albums we are finding our own style. We've brought in Joel [Peters] as the singer, who's doing an immense job and everything is pumping.

Peters is a great addition to the group, delivering with authority and style. How did you find him? Were there auditions?
Lots of people sent us their material, but we looked at Joel's post code and he was the closest to us. No, really, he does live the closest, he's in Bristol. But Joel was by far the best.

If somebody described Phil Campbell & Bastard Sons' music as dirty rock'n'roll delivered with an eighties twist, would you be okay with that?
That's completely fine. I like that.

What's it *really* like being in a band with your three sons?
We all live fairly close to each other, which is a big help. It's not like the old days of Motörhead, because I haven't had a drink for five years. Well, maybe I'll have one beer before the show, but the over-indulgence of Motörhead is gone. If possible we try not to spend more than two or three weeks on the road, and it all works well. Everyone has a laugh and I'm really enjoying it.

Should one of the lads misbehave, do you make them sit on the naughty step of the tour bus?
[Laughs] No, no, no. The misbehaving goes on after I've gone to bed. And I'm always the first to bed. You know what, I used to laugh at rock bands that took afternoon naps, but I've become one of them. Naps are great.

Your wife was initially a bit unhappy with the name of the band. Has she warmed to it yet?
Not really. She'll never be keen, because all of our kids are legitimate, but she puts up with the name.

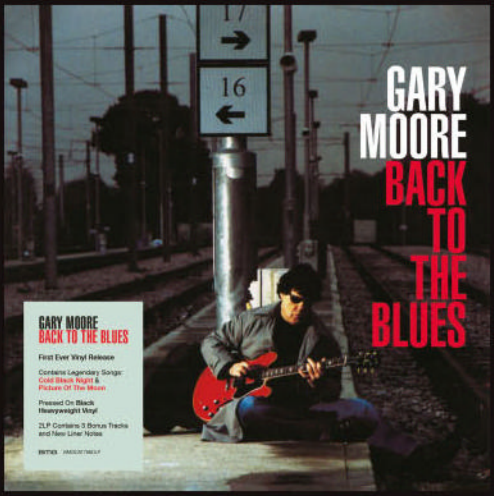
Presumably you include some Motörhead songs in the shows?
Probably eighty per cent of our audience is Motörhead, and of course they want to hear *Ace Of Spades* and a couple of other classics, but most of the set is original material.

Former Saxon guitarist Paul Quinn along with his 'other' band The Cards, is the special guest for this tour.
That'll be a lot of fun. He's just retired from the road [with Saxon], and now he's back touring again. That's typical Paul. I think he wants to get back to the blues a bit. **DL**

The last date of the tour is Birmingham Institute 2 on December 2.

STEPHEN DAVIES/PRESS

GARY MOORE



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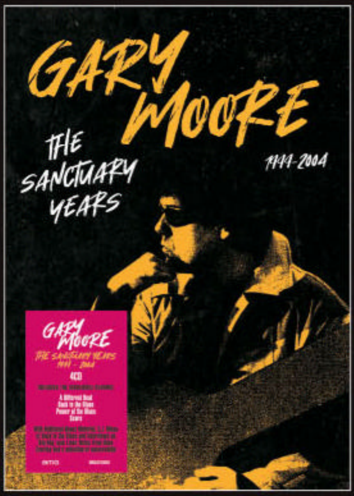
2LP/CD



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Tour Dates

Recommended

ALABAMA 3

Newcastle	University	Nov 10
Liverpool	Academy	Nov 11
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Nov 16
Glasgow	SWG3	Nov 17
Edinburgh	La Belle Angel	Nov 18
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Nov 19
Cambridge	Junction	Nov 23
Birmingham	Academy 2	Nov 24
Manchester	The Ritz	Nov 25
Southampton	1865	Nov 30
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Dec 1
Cardiff	Tramshed	Dec 2
Bournemouth	Academy	Dec 6
Brighton	Concorde 2	Dec 7
Bristol	Academy	Dec 8
London	Kentish Town Forum	Dec 9

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

THE ALARM ACOUSTIC

Hastings	Black Box	Nov 10
Derby	Flowerpot	Nov 12
Hertford	Corn Exchange	Nov 15
Leeds	Old Woollen	Nov 22
Darwen	Library Theatre	Nov 23
Glasgow	Oran Mor	Nov 26

THE ALMIGHTY, BALAAM & THE ANGEL

Glasgow	Barrowland	Nov 30
Manchester	Academy	Dec 1
London	Kentish Town Forum	Dec 2

THE ANSWER, KIRA MAC

Manchester	Academy 2	Nov 15
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Nov 16
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Nov 17
Glasgow	King Tut's Wah Wah Hut	Nov 18
Belfast	Limelight	Dec 9

BATTLE BEAST

London	Brixton Electric	Nov 25
Bristol	The Fleece	Nov 26
Manchester	Academy 2	Nov 28
Glasgow	Cathouse	Nov 29
Birmingham	Asylum	Dec 1

BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE

Sheffield	Leadmill	Jan 18
Manchester	The Ritz	Jan 20
Blackburn	King George's Hall	Feb 2
Blackpool	UK Blues Festival	Feb 4
Cardiff	Acapella Studios	Apr 5
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	Apr 16
Leicester	The Musician	Apr 17
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Apr 18
Kinross	Green Hotel	Apr 19
New Marske	Institute Club	Apr 20
London	Soho Pizza Express	Apr 21
Ramsgate	Red Arrow Club	Apr 23
Leamington Spa	Temperance	Apr 24
Aldershot	West End Centre	Apr 25
Hampshire	Forest Arts Centre	Apr 26
Stockton-On-Tees	Blues At The Bay	Apr 27
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Apr 29
Stowmarket	John Peel Centre	May 1
Hastings	Black Box	May 2

BLAZE BAYLEY

Winchester	The Railway	Nov 10
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Nov 11

THE BITES

Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Nov 28
Trecco Bay	Planet Rockstock Festival	Nov 30
Wolverhampton	Giffard Arms	Dec 1
Sheffield	Winter Rocks Festival	Dec 2
Chester	Live Rooms	Dec 3
Newcastle	Little Buildings	Dec 5
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Dec 6
Bradford	Nightrain	Dec 7
London	Camden Black Heart	Dec 8
Plymouth	Junction	Dec 10
Southampton	The Joiners	Dec 11
Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Dec 12
Grimsby	Yardbirds	Dec 14
Nottingham	Rock City Beta	Dec 16
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Dec 17

BLACKBERRY SMOKE, THE STEEL WOODS

Glasgow	Academy	Sep 9
Edinburgh	Academy	Sep 10
Manchester	Apollo	Sep 12
Birmingham	Academy	Sep 13
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Sep 14

JOE BONAMASSA

London	Royal Albert Hall	Apr 4, 5

GRAHAM BONNET BAND

Troon	Winterstorm Festival	Nov 25
Sheffield	Corporation	Nov 26
Manchester	Academy 3	Nov 28
London	Islington Academy	Nov 29
Trecco Bay	Planet Rockstock	Dec 1

BRAVE RIVAL

Whitby	Rocks	Nov 10
Doncaster	The Leopard	Nov 11
London	Gt Portland Street 229 Club	Nov 16
Sheffield	The Greystones	Nov 17
Keighley	Studio 5	Nov 18
Glasgow	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	Nov 19
York	Fulford Arms	Nov 20
Oxford	The Bullingdon	Nov 22
Portsmouth	Wedgewood Rooms	Dec 21
Brighton	Komedia	Dec 22
Leamington Spa	Temperance	Jan 26
Silsden	Town Hall	Jan 27
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Feb 25
Ramsgate	Red Arrow Music Club	Feb 27

BRING ME THE HORIZON

Cardiff	International Arena	Jan 9
Bournemouth	International Centre	Jan 10
Birmingham	Utility Arena	Jan 12
Manchester	AO Arena	Jan 13
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jan 14
Newcastle	Utilita Arena	Jan 16
Liverpool	M&S Bank Arena	Jan 17
Sheffield	Utilita Arena	Jan 18
London	O2 Arena	Jan 20
Dublin	3 Arena	Jan 23

BRITISH LION, TONY MOORE'S AWAKE

London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Jan 4
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Jan 5
Bradford	Nightrain	Jan 6
Liverpool	Furnace	Jan 7
Aberdeen	Lemon Tree	Jan 9
Edinburgh	Liquid Rooms	Jan 10
Carlisle	Brickyard	Jan 12
Colchester	Arts Centre	Jan 13
Margate	Ballroom	Jan 14
Merthyr Tydfil	Redhouse Cymru	Jan 16
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Jan 17
Bournemouth	Old Fire Station	Jan 18
Isle Of Wight	Strings Bar & Venue	Jan 20
Gravesend	Leo's Red Lion	Jan 21
Southend-on-Sea	Chinnerys	Jan 22
Hastings	Black Box	Jan 23

GARY BROOKER TRIBUTE CONCERT ERIC CLAPTON, ROGER TAYLOR, MIKE RUTHERFORD, MORE

Guildford	G Live	Dec 4

DANNY BRYANT

Darlington	Forum Music Centre	Jan 12

BUCKCHERRY, THE TREATMENT, RUBIKON

Bristol	Thekla	Jan 23
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Room	Jan 24
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jan 26
Buckley	Tivoli	Jan 27
Manchester	Club Academy	Jan 28
Glasgow	Garage	Jan 30
Newcastle	Riverside	Jan 31
London	Islington Academy	Feb 2
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Feb 3
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Feb 4

BUZZCOCKS

Preston	Guildhall	Nov 19
Aberdare	Jacs	Nov 23
Wrexham	Rocking Chair	Nov 24
Belfast	Telegraph Building	Nov 25
Dublin	Academy	Nov 26
Cork	Cyprus Avenue	Nov 28
Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Mar 15
London	Camden Koko	Mar 22

PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS, THE CARDS

Stoke-on-Trent	Sugarmill	Nov 21
Glasgow	Garage	Nov 22
Leeds	Warehouse	Nov 23
Manchester	Bread Shed	Nov 24
Derby	Hairy Dog	Nov 25
Oxford	Academy	Nov 26
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Nov 28
London	Islington Academy	Nov 29
Porthcawl	Planet Rockstock	Nov 30
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Dec 1
Birmingham	Institute 2	Dec 2

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

HALESTORM

Once fast-rising but now flying high, the American quartet get better and better, and their live shows are part of the reason.

London	Wembley Arena	Dec 9

CARDINAL BLACK

Looe	Blues Rhythm & Rock Festival	Dec 2
Bristol	Trinity	Dec 5
Hastings	Black Box	Dec 6
London	Camden Dingwalls	Dec 7

CATS IN SPACE

Wimborne	Tivoli Theatre	Nov 9
Ilfracombe	Landmark Theatre	Nov 10
Maidenhead	Norden Farm	Nov 11
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Dec 13
Southampton	The Brook	Dec 14
Wavendon	The Stables	Dec 15
Swansea	Patti Pavilions	Dec 16
Stockport	Forum Theatre	Mar 1
Bathgate	Regal	Mar 2

CAVALERA

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Nov 9
Manchester	Academy	Nov 10
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Nov 11

COLLATERAL

Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 27
Newcastle	Trillians	Nov 28
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Nov 29
Swindon	Underground	Feb 16
Swansea	Bunkhouse	Feb 17
Wrexham	XS	Feb 18
Glasgow	Garage	Feb 23
Sheffield	Corporation	Feb 24
London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Feb 25

THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN

Cardiff	Earl Hague	Nov 17
London	Kentish Town Forum	Nov 18
Birmingham	Hare & Hounds	Nov 19
Bristol	The Fleece	Nov 21
Southampton	1865	Nov 22
Hitchin	Club 85	Nov 23
Lewes	Conservative Club	Nov 26
Huddersfield	Parish	Apr 24

CROW BLACK CHICKEN

Stowmarket	John Peel Centre	Nov 29
Hertford	Corn Exchange	Nov 30
Leamington Spa	Temperance	Dec 1

ROSALIE CUNNINGHAM

Great Yarmouth	HRH Prog Festival	Nov 10
Northampton	Black Prince	Nov 11

DANKO JONES, RADKEY

Bristol	Thekla	Dec 12
Glasgow	King Tut's Wah Wah Hut	Dec 13
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Dec 14
Manchester	Rebellion	Dec 15
London	Highbury Garage	Dec 16

THE DARKNESS

Belfast	Telegraph Building	Dec 2
Dublin	Olympia	Dec 3
Edinburgh	Academy	Dec 5
Newcastle	City Hall	Dec 7
Norwich	UEA	Dec 8
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Dec 9
Glasgow	Barrowland	Dec 11
Manchester	New Century Hall	Dec 12
Bristol	Beacon	Dec 14
Nottingham	Rock City	Dec 15
Wolverhampton	Wulfrun Hall	Dec 16
Leeds	Academy	Dec 18
Nottingham	Rock City	Dec 19
Brighton	Dome	Dec 20
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Dec 22

DEAD MAN'S WHISKEY, TWISTER

Gravesend	Red Lion	Nov 11
Norwich	Brickmakers	Nov 12
Cannock	The Station	Nov 14
Newcastle	The Cluny	Nov 15
Glasgow	Audio	Nov 16
Leeds	Santiago Bar	Nov 18
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Nov 19
Cardiff	Fuel Rock Club	Nov 22
Swindon	Level III	Nov 23
Liverpool	Zanzibar Club	Nov 24
Southampton	Suburbia	Nov 25

DEATH CULT

Liverpool	Guild of Students	Nov 10
Glasgow	Barrowland	Nov 12
Nottingham	Rock City	Nov 13
Birmingham	Institute	Nov 14
Bournemouth	Academy	Nov 16
Norwich	UEA	Nov 17
Manchester	Albert Hall	Nov 18
London	Brixton Electric	Nov 20, 21
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Nov 22

DEPECHE MODE

London	O2 Arena	Jan 22, 27
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jan 24
Manchester	AO Arena	Jan 29
Glasgow	Hydro	Jan 31

PAUL DI'ANNO

London	Camden Underworld	Nov 29

EMPYRE, SYPHA

Hastings	Black Box	Dec 16

EVILE

Manchester	Bread Shed	Nov 10
Birmingham	Devil's Dog	Nov 11
Edinburgh	La Belle Angele	Nov 17
Sheffield	Corporation	Nov 18
Derby	Hairy Dog	Nov 12
Swansea	Bunkhouse	Nov 12
Southampton	Suburbia	Nov 12
London	New Cross Inn	Nov 12

EXTREME, LIVING COLOUR

Newcastle	City Hall	Nov 27
Glasgow	Academy	Nov 28
Manchester	Academy	Nov 30
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Dec 1
Bristol	Academy	Dec 3
London	Kentish Town Forum	Dec 4

FLORENCE BLACK

Glasgow	Classic Grand	Feb 1
Newcastle	University	Feb 2
Manchester	Academy 3	Feb 3

HELLE ARENSBAK / GETTY

Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Feb 5
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Feb 6
Bournemouth	Old Fire Station	Feb 8
London	Tufnell Park Dome	Feb 9
Cardiff	Tramshed	Feb 10

FM

Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Nov 26
Tunbridge Wells	Assembly Hall	Dec 1
Nantwich	Civic Hall	Mar 30
Brighton	Concorde	Apr 5
Wavendon	The Stables	Apr 6
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	May 3
Gateshead	The Sage	May 4
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 5
Bury St Edmunds	Apex	May 10
Birmingham	Asylum	May 11
Cardiff	Tramshed	May 17
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	May 18
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	May 19
Southampton	1865	May 24
London	Camden Dingwalls	May 25
Glasgow	Oran Mor	May 31
Aberdeen	Lemon Tree	Jun 1

FOCUS

Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Nov 10
Great Yarmouth	HRH Festival	Nov 11
London	Bush Hall	Nov 12
Chislehurst	Beaverwood Club	Nov 14
Bristol	The Fleece	Nov 16
Howden	Shire Hall	Nov 17
Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Nov 18
Sale	Waterside Arts Centre	Nov 19
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Nov 21
Kinross	Green Hotel	Nov 22
Galashiels	Mac Arts	Nov 23
Troon	Winterstorm Concert Hall	Nov 24
Southampton	1865	Nov 26

FOO FIGHTERS

Manchester	Old Trafford	Jun 13, 15
Glasgow	Hampden Park	Jun 17
London	Stadium	Jun 20, 21
Cardiff	Principality Stadium	Jun 25
Birmingham	Villa Park	Jun 27

THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM

Glasgow	Academy	Jun 18
Sheffield	Academy	Jun 21
Manchester	Apollo	Jun 22
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Jun 23
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Jun 25, 26
Dublin	3 Olympia	Jun 29
Nottingham	Rock City	Jul 10
Cheltenham	2000 Trees Festival	Jul 11

GINGER PLAYS THE WILDHEARTS

Harlow	Burnt Mill Social Club	Nov 24
London	West Hampstead Arts Centre	Dec 9, 13
Cambridge	Six Six Bar	Dec 10
Birmingham	Hare & Hounds	Dec 11
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Dec 14
Huddersfield	The Parish	Dec 15
Sheffield	The Greystones	Dec 17, 18
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Dec 21
Newcastle	The Cluny	Dec 22
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Dec 23
Mexborough	Imperial Music Venue	Jan 13
Leicester	The Musician	Mar 30

THE GODFATHERS

London	Islington Academy	Nov 10

GREEN LUNG

Glasgow	Cathouse	Nov 22
Manchester	Gorilla	Nov 23
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Nov 24
Sheffield	Corporation	Nov 25
Bristol	Thekla	Nov 26
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Nov 30
Norwich	Arts Centre	Dec 1
Southampton	Joiners	Dec 2
Brighton	Patterns	Dec 3
London	King's Cross Scala	Dec 10

GRETA VAN FLEET, MT JOY

London	Wembley Arena	Nov 14
Dublin	3 Arena	Nov 16
Manchester	AO Arena	Nov 19
Glasgow	The Hydro	Nov 20

GUN

Trecco Bay	Planet Rockstock	Dec 2
Aberdeen	Lemon Tree	Dec 7
Glasgow	Barrowland	Dec 9

STEVE HACKETT (2024)

Aylesbury	Friars Waterside	Oct 2
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Oct 3
Bristol	Beacon	Oct 5
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Oct 6
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Oct 7
Liverpool	Philharmonic	Oct 9
Cardiff	St David's Hall	Oct 10
Guildford	G Live	Oct 12

Hanley	Victoria Hall	Oct 13
York	Barbican	Oct 15
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	Oct 16
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Oct 18
Gateshead	Glasshouse	Oct 19
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Oct 20
Reading	Hexagon	Oct 22
London	Royal Albert Hall	Oct 23

HALESTORM, BLACK VEIL BRIDES

London	Wembley Arena	Dec 9

ROBERT HART'S BAD CO FEAT DAVE BUCKET COLWELL

London	Putney Half Moon	Nov 22

HEAVY PETTIN

Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Dec 20

HELMET

Leeds	Key Club	Dec 5
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Dec 6
Dublin	Academy	Dec 8
Limerick	Dolans	Dec 9
Belfast	Limelight	Dec 10
Glasgow	Cathouse	Dec 11
Mancester	Club Academy	Dec 12
London	Tufnell Park Dome	Dec 13

THE HOT DAMN!

Sheffield	Corporation	Nov 17
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Nov 19

JETHRO TULL

Bournemouth	Pavilion	Apr 19
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Apr 20
London	Palladium	Apr 22
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Apr 23
Aberdeen	Music Hall	Apr 29
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Apr 30
Gateshead	The Sage	May 2
Sheffield	City Hall	May 3
Salford	The Lowry	May 5
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	May 6

LAURENCE JONES

Porthcawl	Planet Rockstock	Dec 1
Southampton	The Brook	Dec 7
Wavendon	The Stables	Dec 14
Sheffield	The Greystones	Dec 15
Kendal	Brewery Arts Centre	Dec 16
London	Camden The Forge	Jan 23
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Feb 4
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	Feb 9
Shoreham-by-Sea	Ropetackle Arts Centre	Feb 10
Hastings	Black Box	Mar 1

JUDAS PRIEST, SAXON, URIAH HEEP

Glasgow	The Hydro	Mar 11
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Mar 13
Dublin	3 Arena	Mar 15
Bournemouth	International Centre	Mar 17
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	Mar 19
London	Wembley Arena	Mar 21

KING KING

Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	Nov 10
Stockton-on-Tees	ARC	Nov 11
Glenrothes	Rothes Halls	Nov 17
Clitheroe	The Grand	Nov 18
Edinburgh	Liquid Room	Nov 19
Gloucester	Guildhall	Nov 21
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Nov 22
Nuneaton	Queens Hall	Nov 23

LARKIN POE, THE SHEEPDOGS

Bristol	Academy	Oct 17
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 18
Manchester	Albert Hall	Oct 20
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Oct 21

LEAF HOUND

London	Camden Underworld	Jan 26

GEDDY LEE (SPOKEN WORD)

Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Dec 10
Sheffield	City Hall	Dec 13
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Dec 14
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Dec 17
London	Barbican Centre	Dec 18

TILL LINDEMANN

London	Wembley Arena	Dec 12

LINDISFARNE

Morecambe	Platform	Nov 24
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	Nov 30, Dec 1
Liverpool	Philharmonic Music Room	Dec 2, 3
Kinross	Green Hotel	Dec 8, 9
Aberdeen	Lemon Tree	Dec 10
Manchester	Stoller Hall	Dec 15
Newcastle	City Hall	Dec 23

LIVING COLOUR

Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Nov 26
Buckley	Tivoli	Dec 2

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

With their broad appeal, a smokin' new album and a punchy delivery, it's a guaranteed good night out. We'll see you at the bar.

See below for dates. Currently November 14 to November 22.

PEDRO GOMES / GETTY

MADBALL

London	Camden Underworld	Nov 13

Recommended

MANIC STREET PREACHERS, SUEDE

Llangollen	International Musical Eisteddfod	Jun 28
Dublin	Trinity College	Jul 2
Cardiff	Castle	Jul 5
Edinburgh	Castle	Jul 10
Manchester	Castlefield Bowl	Jul 12
Leeds	Millennium Square	Jul 13
London	Alexandra Palace Park	Jul 18

MARILLION

Wolverhampton	The Halls	Nov 24
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Nov 26

RICHARD MARX

London	Royal Albert Hall	May 22

MASSIVE WAGONS

Norwich	Epic Studios	Nov 14
Swansea	Patti Pavilion	Nov 15
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Nov 16
Bournemouth	Old Fire Station	Nov 18
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Nov 19
Liverpool	Hangar 34	Nov 21
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Nov 23
Troon	Winterstorm Festival	Nov 24
Newcastle	Northumbria University	Nov 25

CHANTEL McGREGOR

Halifax	Albany Arcade	Nov 23
Troon	Winterstorm Festival	Nov 25
Looe	Blues Rhythm & Rck Fest	Dec 2
Leamington Spa	Temperance	Dec 22
Barton upon Humber	Ropewalk	Jan 27
Hertford	Corn Exchange	Feb 1
Blackpool	Love Live Festival	Feb 10
Sheffield	The Greystones	Mar 23

LUKE MORLEY, HILLBILLY VEGAS

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jan 25
Glasgow	Cathouse	Jan 26
Newcastle	Riverside	Jan 27
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jan 29
Cardiff	Globe	Jan 30
London	Islington Academy	Jan 31

MOSTLY AUTUMN

Buckley	Tivoli	Nov 17
Bury	The Met	Nov 26
Bilston	Robin 2	Dec 2
Wavendon	The Stables	Dec 6
Southampton	1865	Dec 8
York	The Crescent	Dec 10

JOHN OTWAY & WILD WILLY BARRETT

Bilston	Robin 2	Jan 14
Barnsoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Mar 31
Nantwich	Jazz, Blues & Music Festival	Apr 1
Frome	Merlin Theatre	Apr 6
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Apr 7

Cambridge	Storey's Field Centre	May 4
Hull	Social	Jul 28

OZRIC TENTACLES, GONG

Oxford	Academy 2	Nov 17
London	Kentish Town Forum	Nov 18
Manchester	The Ritz	Nov 19
Sheffield	Academy 2	Nov 20
Colchester	Arts Centre	Nov 21
Northampton	Roadmender	Nov 23
Bristol	Academy	Nov 24
Gloucester	Guildhall	Nov 25
Birmingham	Academy 2	Nov 26
Brighton	Chalk	Nov 28
Norwich	Epic Studios	Nov 29
Bournemouth	Academy	Nov 30
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Dec 1
Liverpool	Academy	Dec 2

PARADISE LOST, MY DYING BRIDE

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Dec 1
Bradford	St George's Hall	Dec 14

ROBERT PLANT PRESENTS SAVING GRACE FEATURING SUZI DIAN

Oxford	New Theatre	Nov 13
Basingstoke	The Anvil	Nov 16
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Nov 17
Grimsby	Auditorium	Nov 19
Gateshead	The Sage	Nov 20
Bradford	St George's Hall	Nov 22
Hanley	Victoria Hall	Nov 23

COZY POWELL BIRTHDAY BASH
HARRY JAMES, CHRIS GLEN, CHRIS BUCK, MORE

Bilston	Robin 2	Dec 30

PRAYING MANTIS

Hastings	Black Box	Nov 22
Raynes Park	The Cavern	Nov 23
Cannock	The Station	Nov 24
Troon	Winterstorm Festival	Nov 25

THE PRODIGY

Glasgow	The Hydro	Nov 16
Manchester	AO Arena	Nov 17
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Nov 18
Brighton	Centre	Nov 20
Cardiff	International Arena	Nov 21
Birmingham Utilita Arena Nov 23		
London	Alexandra Palace	Nov 24, 25

SUZI QUATRO

Cardiff	St David's Hall	Nov 12
Brighton	Dome	Nov 13
London	Palladium	Nov 15
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Nov 16
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Nov 18

QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE, THE CHATS, DEEP TAN

Manchester	AO Arena	Nov 14
London	O2 Arena	Nov 15
Bournemouth	BIC	Nov 16
Glasgow	The Hydro	Nov 18
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	Nov 19
Stockton-on-Tees	Globe Theatre	Nov 20
Dublin	3 Arena	Nov 22

FÉLIX RABIN

Kinross	Green Hotel	Nov 19
Sheffield	Greystones	Nov 22
Cardiff	Acapella Studios	Nov 30

RAGE

London	Camden Underworld	Dec 3

RAVEN, GIRLSCHOOL, ALKATRAZZ, AIRFORCE

Glasgow	Ivory Blacks	Feb 14
Newcastle	Trillians	Feb 15
Manchester	Academy	Feb 16
London	Tufnell Park Dome	Feb 17
Birmingham	Asylum	Feb 19
Southampton	1865	Feb 20

THE RAVEN AGE

Dublin	Academy 2	Nov 10
Belfast	Limelight 2	Nov 11
Birmingham	Asylum	Nov 13
Bristol	Exchange	Nov 15

ROMEO'S DAUGHTER

Hastings	Black Box	Nov 18
Newcastle	Trillians	Nov 22
Troon	WinterStorm Festival	Nov 23
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 23
Hull	Wrecking Ball	Nov 25

FRANCIS ROSSI, TUNES & CHAT

Cheltenham	Town Hall	Nov 10
Stourbridge	Town Hall	Nov 11
Worcester	Huntingdon Hall	Nov 12
Swansea	Grand Theatre	Nov 14
Milford Haven	Torch	Nov 15
Porthcawl	Grand Pavilion	Nov 17
Frome	Memorial Theatre	Nov 18
Yeovil	Westlands	Nov 19
Corby	The Core	Nov 21
Runcorn	Brindley	Nov 22
Workington	Carnegie Hall	Nov 24
Burnley	Mechanics	Nov 25
Lytham St Annes	Lowther Pavilion	Nov 26
Barrow in Furness	The Forum	Nov 28

ULI JON ROTH

Cardiff	The Globe	Nov 20
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Nov 21
Sheffield	Corporation	Nov 22
Leeds	Key	Nov 23
Troon	Winterstorm Festival	Nov 24
Newcastle	Riverside	Nov 26
Manchester	Canvas	Nov 27
London	Highbury Garage	Nov 28
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Nov 29

PHILIP SAYCE, TROY REDFERN

Bristol	The Fleece	Nov 19
Manchester	Band On The Wall	Nov 20
Newcastle	The Cluny	Nov 21
Glasgow	Oran Mor	Nov 23
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Nov 24
London	Highbury Garage	Nov 25

MICHAEL SCHENKER GROUP, NIGHT DEMON

Troon	WinterStorm Festival	Nov 23
Dublin	Academy	Nov 24
Belfast	Limelight	Nov 25
Manchester	The Ritz	Nov 28
Sheffield	Academy	Nov 29
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Nov 30
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Dec 1
Trecco Bay	Planet Rockstock Festival	Dec 2

Recommended

SIMPLE MINDS, DEL AMITRI

Leeds	First Direct Arena	Mar 15
Manchester	AO Arena	Mar 16
Dublin	3 Arena	Mar 18
Belfast	SSE Arena	Mar 19
London	O2 Arena	Mar 21
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Mar 23
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Mar 24
Bournemouth	International Centre	Mar 26
Cardiff	Utilita Arena	Mar 27
Glasgow	The Hydro	Mar 29

SISTERS OF MERCY, VIRGINMARYS

Bristol	Marble Factory	Nov 15
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Nov 16
Newcastle	NX	Nov 18
Nottingham	Rock City	Nov 19
Manchester	Academy	Nov 21
Glasgow	SWG3	Nov 22

SKINDRED

Cardiff	Great Hall	Nov 10
Southampton	Guildhall	Nov 11
Belfast	Limelight 1	Nov 17

TERJE DOKKEN / ALAMY

Dublin	Academy	Nov 18
Manchester	Academy	Mar 14
London	Wembley Arena	Mar 15
Birmingham	Academy	Mar 16

SLADE

Newcastle	City Hall	Dec 3
Grimsby	Docks Academy	Dec 5
Egham	Royal Holloway SU	Dec 8
Leicester	Academy	Dec 15
Sheffield	Foundry	Dec 16
Cardiff	Tramshed	Dec 18
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Dec 19
Margate	Dreamland	Dec 21
Oxford	Academy	Dec 22
Birmingham	Academy	Dec 23

SLEEP TOKEN

London	Wembley Arena	Dec 16

SOFT MACHINE

Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Nov 10
Lewes	Conservative Club	Nov 11
Wavendon	The Stables	Nov 14
Luton	The Bear	Nov 17
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Nov 19
London	Ronnie Scott's Club	Nov 20
London	New Cross Inn	Feb 2
Market Harborough	Jazz Club	Feb 11

AN EVENING WITH SPIKE

Bilston	Robin 2	Nov 30
Bathgate	Dreadnought	Dec 2
Bradford	Nightrain	Dec 16
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Dec 17
Nottingham	Ghost Club	Dec 22

STEELEYE SPAN

Sheffield	Firth Hall	Nov 12
Crewe	Lyceum Theatre	Nov 13
Ilkley	King's Hall	Nov 14
Lytham Saint Annes	Lowther Pavilion	Nov 15
Buxton	Opera House	Nov 16
Portsmouth	New Theatre Royal	Nov 18
Eastbourne	Devonshire Park Theatre	Nov 19
Tunbridge	Wells Assembly Hall	Nov 20
Bristol	St George's Hall	Nov 21
Brighton	Old Market	Nov 23
Redhill	Harlequin Theatre	Nov 24
Warwick	Arts Centre	Nov 25
Wimborne	Tivoli Theatre	Nov 26
Cardiff	St David's Hall	Nov 28
Abergavenny	Borough Theatre	Nov 29
Carmarthen	The Lyric	Nov 30
Stroud	Subscription Rooms	Dec 2
Wavendon	The Stables	Dec 11
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Dec 12
Leicester	Y Theatre	Dec 13
Birmingham	Town Hall	Dec 14
Ipswich	Regent Theatre	Dec 16
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Dec 17
London	Cadogan Hall	Dec 18

STRAY

Raynes Park	The Cavern	Dec 9

SWEET, SARI SCHORR

Wrexham	William Aston Hall	Dec 1
Wolverhampton	Wulfrun	Dec 2
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Dec 8
Glasgow	Queen Margaret Union	Dec 9
Sunderland	Fire Station	Dec 10
Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Dec 14
Manchester	Academy	Dec 15
Lytham	Lowther Pavilion	Dec 16
Cardiff	Tramshed	Dec 17
Nottingham	Rock City	Dec 20
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Dec 21
Poole	Lighthouse	Dec 22
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Dec 23

TANGERINE DREAM

Manchester	Albert Hall	Nov 10
Great Yarmouth	HRH Prog Festival	Nov 11
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Nov 12
Glasgow	St Luke's	Nov 13
Edinburgh	Queen's Hall	Nov 14

COREY TAYLOR

Manchester	Academy	Nov 11
Glasgow	Academy	Nov 12
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Nov 14

TESSERACT

Nottingham	Rock City	Feb 20
Birmingham	Institute	Feb 21
Bristol	Academy	Feb 22
London	Kentish Town Forum	Feb 23
Manchester	The Ritz	Feb 24
Glasgow	SWG3 Studio Warehouse	Feb 25
Dublin	Academy	Feb 27

THESE WICKED RIVERS

Southampton	The Loft	Dec 1
Trecco Bay	Planet Rockstock	Dec 2
Norwich	Waterfront Studio	Dec 6
Birmingham	Asylum	Dec 7
Sheffield	Corporation	Dec 8
Glasgow	Audio	Dec 9
London	Islington Academy	Dec 13
Chester	Live Rooms	Dec 14
Newcastle	Anarchy Brewery	Dec 15
Derby	Hairy Dog	Dec 16
Bristol	Thekla	Dec 17

BLACKBERRY SMOKE

Moving smoothly between rock, blues and the good side of country, Charlie Starr and co. always deliver the good times.

See p99 for dates. Currently September 9 to September 14.

TYKETTO, THIS HOUSE WE BUILT

Troon	Winterstorm Festival	Nov 25
Bradford	Nightrain	Nov 28
Nuneaton	Queens Hall	Nov 30
Trecco Bay	Planet Rockstock	Dec 1
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Dec 2
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Dec 3

VIRGINMARYS

Buckley	Tivoli	Dec 8

WARRIOR SOUL

Reading	Face Bar	Nov 10
Crumlin	Patriot	Nov 12
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Nov 16
Glasgow	Classic Grand	Nov 17
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 18

WAYWARD SONS

Bristol	Thekla	Jan 12
Huddersfield	Parish	Jan 13
Newcastle	Riverside	Jan 14
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jan 19
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jan 20

WITHIN TEMPTATION

Cardiff	Utilita Arena	Nov 15
London	Wembley Arena	Nov 16
Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Nov 18
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Nov 19

WOLFSBANE

Newport	The Patriot	Nov 24
Huddersfield	Parish	Nov 25
Norwich	Brickmakers	Nov 26
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Nov 28
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 29
Newcastle	The Cluny	Nov 30
Bedford	Esquires	Dec 1
Birmingham	Asylum	Dec 3
Sheffield	Greystones	Dec 5
Southampton	Joiner's Arms	Dec 6
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Dec 7
London	King's Cross Water Rats	Dec 8

YES

Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 23
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	May 24
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	May 26
York	Barbican	May 28
Southend-on-Sea	Cliffs Pavilion	May 29
Bristol	Beacon	May 31
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Jun 1
Gateshead	The Sage	Jun 2
London	Royal Albert Hall	Jun 4

HANS ZIMMER

Glasgow	The Hydro	Apr 6
Manchester	AO Arena	Apr 7
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	Apr 9
London	O2 Arena	Apr 10

Festivals

2000 TREES
THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM, MORE

Cheltenham	Upcote Farm	Jul 10-13

BLOODSTOCK
OPETH, AMON AMARTH, CLUTCH, MORE

Derbyshire	Catton Park	Aug 8-11

CALL OF THE WILD
TYKETTO, BAD TOUCH, SOUTH OF SALEM, MORE

Lincolnshire	Showground	May 24-26

GLASGOW BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
THE ANIMALS, CINELLI BROTHERS, BRAVE RIVAL, MORE

Glasgow	Oran Mor	Nov 19

LOOE BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
FULL HOUSE PLAYS FRANKIE MILLER, BRAVE RIVAL, CARDINAL BLACK, MORE

Looe	Tencreek Holiday Park	Dec 1-2

LOVE LIVE
PRAYING MANTIS, CHANTEL McGREGOR, DARE, MORE

Blackpool	Winter Gardens	Feb 9-11

NORTHERN KIN
HAWKWIND, CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN, WATERBOYS, MORE

Durham	Thornley Hall Farm	Jun 14-16

STONEDEAD
KK'S PRIEST, DORO, ECLIPSE, MORE

Newark	Showground	Aug 24

UK BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
ERIC BIBB, WHEN RIVERS MEET, CARDINAL BLACK, MORE

Blackpool	Winter Gardens	Feb 2-4

WHITBY BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
ALVIN YOUNGBLOOD HART, REDFISH, THE MILKMEN, MORE

Whitby	Pavilion	Nov 11

WIDE AWAKE
KING GIZZARD AND THE LIZARD WIZARD, MORE

London	Brockwell Park	May 25

WINTERS END FESTIVAL
MASSIVE WAGONS, THOSE DAMN CROWS, STONE BROKEN, MORE

Trecco Bay	Holiday Park	Feb 2-4

WINTERSTORM: LEGENDS & LEGACIES
MICHAEL SCHENKER GROUP, ULI JOHN ROTH, MASSIVE WAGONS, MORE

Troon	Concert Hall	Nov 23-26

> 'Unsurprisingly, AC/DC have won this audience over in no time.'

AC/DC

PowerTrip Festival, Indio, California

One of rock's greatest put the power into PowerTrip.

★ It's 103 degrees in the California desert, and it's as hot as balls (dirty, big balls). But the anticipation to witness the long-awaited return of AC/DC does not deter this massive, sweat-soaked crowd, who sport blinking devil horns, glowing as far as the eye can see throughout the Empire Polo Club grounds. The population of Indio has doubled in size just for this weekend-long event, with a local tap house launching an exclusive pop-up AC/DC High Voltage Dive Bar, where international fans can meet up, share a beer, get a tattoo, and win a Gibson SG or a Gretsch Malcolm Young Signature Jet. Even Angus Young stops in pre-show to take selfies.

Yes, it's been seven long years of loss and uncertainty, but standing there in front of a wall of Marshalls is the thunder from down under, back in the ring to take another swing and remind the world just who the undisputed kings of rock'n'roll truly are with a proud and triumphant return to the stage at the PowerTrip Festival.

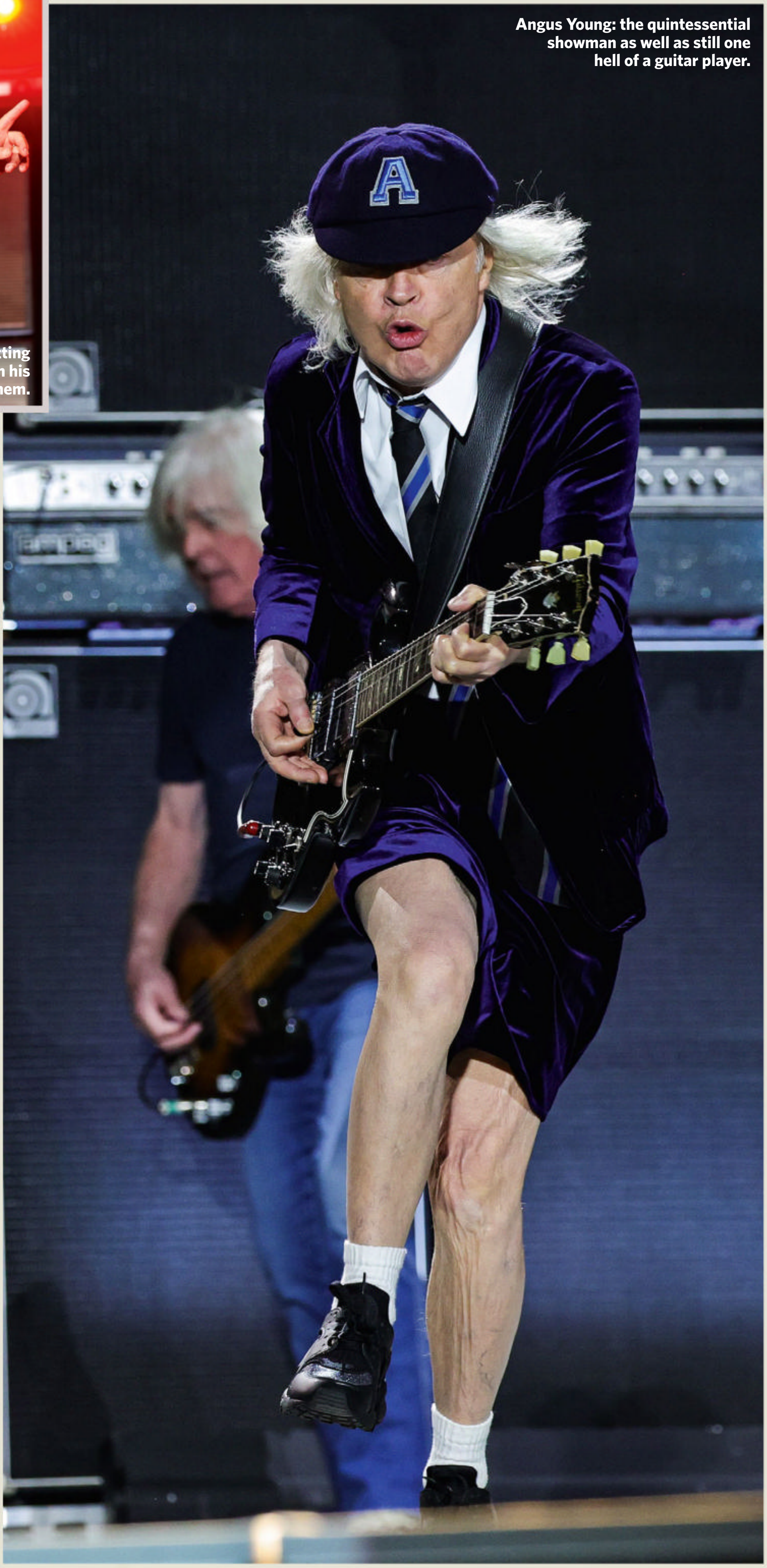
Following an impressive animated sequence of a desolate high-speed car chase, complete with fireworks display, the band electrifies the audience by opening their set for the very first time with 1979's *If You Want Blood (You've Got It)*. And for the next two hours and 15 minutes that's exactly what their global fan base, and fellow bands on the festival line-up, get.

The set-list is killer, offering up two terrific live debuts from their *Power Up* pandemic release, including the radio-friendly *Shot In The Dark* and the blistering *Demon Fire*, in which frontman Brian Johnson, wide-eyed and all smiles, delivers his best Nasty Canasta voice from the 1950s Looney Tunes character. Make that three live debuts if you consider *Riff Raff*, which Johnson has only performed once before (on VH1 in 1996). By the time *Shot Down In Flames, Dirty Deeds* and *Thunderstruck* hit, euphoria abounds and shockwaves are sent through every soul in the valley with anthemic singalong choruses and dancing in the aisles. Unsurprisingly, AC/DC have won this audience over in no time.

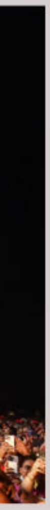
Ever the quintessential showman, Angus Young is sporting an unexpected silver do (looking like a cross between Doc Brown and a stately Jimmy Page), and he's still rocking that indigo crushed velvet schoolboy uniform, nailing every Chuck Berry duck walk, incessantly bobbing his head, and even delivering the Curly Fall and Spin right on cue. Yes, the striptease routine may be retired, but the extensive guitar solos are very well-employed this evening.

But make no mistake about it, this is Brian Johnson's night, and Angus Young makes sure of that. For Brian, who celebrated his 76th birthday just two days prior (making him the eldest singer on the festival bill, which also included Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Guns N' Roses, Tool and Metallica), the pressure must've been immense to step back on stage after being forced off their previous tour due to health issues. Even after getting in shape and rehearsing for six weeks leading up to PowerTrip, pushing through this gruelling 24-song set-list takes everything Johnson has left in the tank, and it's a courageously awesome sight to witness. Although his energy and charisma are infectious, by the time the band tackle *Highway To Hell*, he asks the audience: "C'mon, help me here," and he truly means it.

Brian Johnson: getting a little help from his friends – 85,000 of them.



Angus Young: the quintessential showman as well as still one hell of a guitar player.



Even long-time bassist Cliff Williams has been lured out of retirement to thump this one out, and he and rhythm guitarist Stevie Young (offering up the 'clean dirty' sound that uncle Malcolm bestowed upon him) both provide perhaps some of the best live backing vocals to date in support of Johnson's diminishing grit.

Half a dozen tracks from the biggest-selling hard rock album of all time, *Back In Black*, are given an airing tonight, including the title track, *Hells Bells, Shoot To Thrill, Have A Drink On Me, You Shook Me All Night Long* and, delightfully, *Givin' The Dog A Bone*.

On the cusp of celebrating their 50th anniversary, and even rumblings of a possible tour to honour this golden achievement, the Australian icons display few signs of rust and a more than impressive performance in their twilight years, even digging further into the Bon Scott era with *Sin City, Dog Eat Dog, Hell Ain't A Bad Place To Be* and the truly spiritual *High Voltage*.

The unsung hero of the night may be South Carolina native Matt Laug, a session drummer who was announced as Phil Rudd's replacement just weeks before the show. AC/DC's veteran drummer has been unable to play live with the band since 2010, but the 55-year old Laug, who has supported AC/DC before as the touring drummer with Slash's Snakepit, is not only on-point, but also plays with a style reminiscent of Rudd's inimitable hard-hitting swing.

It's Laug who suggests that the band dust off the foot-stomping *Stiff Upper Lip*, dovetailing nicely into *Rock 'N' Roll Train*, but the true test comes when the hard-driving classics *Whole Lotta Rosie* and *Let There Be Rock* are played to perfection back to back without missing a beat. Even the most loyal of AC/DC fans give Matt the devil horns up. ("Now the question is," Laug asks on Instagram later, "What to do after walking on the moon?")

With both encores –*T.N.T.* and the 21-gun explosive climax of *For Those About To Rock* – accompanied by spectacular cannon fire that leaves the desert echoing with the thunderous roar, the audience's collective salute is a fitting tribute to the enduring legacy of AC/DC. AC/DC destroyed.

After the smoke clears, I run into hard rock/metal radio personality Eddie Trunk, who asks me what I thought of the performance. I said: "I was almost in tears, I was so proud of them." He quickly responds that Lars Ulrich just said the same thing to him backstage. And the 85,000-plus fans who came to see AC/DC at least one more time would agree.
Kurt Squiers

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY

LIVE!

Muse
London O2 Arena

Their bleakest end-of-days sci-fi satire yet.

★ Like *Squid Game* gone *Mad Max*, a post-apocalyptic battle rages on the O2's screens between a rebel uprising of hooded, mirror-faced androids and a crumbling empire led by a horned mecha-demon called Baph. The skirmish spills onto the stage, where three of the rebels (plus an additional keyboard sidekick) rampage beneath a flaming symbol made up of the initials of their slogan – Will Of The People – making demands in military-glam style. "Welcome to the desecration, baby," the ringleader howls in shrill falsetto.

This, then, is Muse's sci-fi satire on the current geo-political shit-show, and their typically end-of-days outlook on the encroaching cataclysm is as bleak as they've ventured. Yet they send us out with smiles on faces. Modern space-rock behemoths such as *Hysteria, Stockholm Syndrome, Time Is Running Out* and *Plug In Baby* still sound like billionaires could flee the burning planet in them. Meanwhile, the 40-foot head of a rebel overseer with an ever-shifting digital face – Matt Bellamy singing *Kill Or Be Killed; Terminator 2* transformations galore; a parade of cinematic serial killers and monsters for spook rocker *You Make Me Feel Like It's Halloween* – emerges from the back of the stage and peers around at the audience. By the galloping *Knights Of Cydonia* Baph arrives in stage-filling inflatable glory, as if calling down Armadeggon. Loudly, London surrenders.

Mark Beaumont

Matt Bellamy: leading the warning of the impending apocalypse.

'Muse's end-of-days outlook is as bleak as they've ventured.'

Glenn Hughes / The Damned Truth
Bexhill De La Warr Pavilion

Deep Purple revisited. Third time's the charm.

★ Later, Glenn Hughes praised openers The Damn Truth, so he would doubtless have been mortified to hear they had been hamstrung by a mix that muffled Tom Shemer's guitar. On the plus side, that emphasised the extraordinary power and tone of Lee-La Baum's vocals. But weighed against that, the frontwoman's band (already robbed of subtleties brought to their studio recordings by Bob Rock's production) were left throwing clichéd shapes while delivering sluggish, stop-start arrangements. Only towards the end of the set, when they hit a groove and stuck to it with *Only Love, Look Innocent* and superb closer *Tomorrow*, did The Damn Truth look like turning 'okay' to 'good'.

Not so Glenn Hughes, who started at 'great' and stayed there. For his third tour in six years with a Deep Purple set, he shuffled the running order and (thankfully) binned *Smoke On The Water*, and this was the best tour of the three. Much credit to guitarist Soren Andersen (who delivers Blackmore and Bolin songs with aplomb) but, from gleaming white teeth to pink-painted thumbnails, Hughes defies the ageing process. His voice, even when he's a foot from the mic, still delivers power and passion. Instead of starting at gold standard and fading to bronze, across these three tours he's somehow risen to triple platinum.

Neil Jeffries

Blink-182
Birmingham Utilita Arena

Kourtney Kardashian's hubby re-rattles his traps.

★ Tom DeLonge seeks to rouse tonight's audience early on with an impassioned: "Come on, Manchester." The problem is that the Mark, Tom and Travis show doesn't roll into Manchester until the following night. Tonight it's Birmingham.

In truth, DeLonge – who jokingly addresses the 15,000-strong audience as Manchester for the rest of the night – could say whatever he wants. Blink fans are just pleased to have him back after his seven-year hiatus from the band. Not only is he back, but on tonight's showing he's also far happier to be there, and more polished in his performance compared to any time in the past 20 years or so. He revels in the puerile potty-mouthery of *Family Reunion* and the fan favourites *Feeling This* and *Dumpweed,* and leads an energized band through songs from new album *One More Time.*

His bandmates seem to be having just as much of a blast. Travis Barker again displays his mastery of the drum kit, peppering beats with all manner of extra accents and fills, and plays *Violence* while blindfolded.

Mark Hoppus provides the highlight of the night with a heartfelt address on his brush with death (having been diagnosed with stage-four lymphoma in 2021) before an emotional *Adam's Song*. It's there that we remember the deaths and near-tragedies it's taken to reunite Blink-182. Tonight, Birmingham is delighted to have them back.

Rich Chamberlain

Hawkwind, The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown
London Royal Albert Hall

There's disappointment in the air when the space-rockers change the flight plan.

★ Four years after a 50th-anniversary knees-up at this venue, Hawkwind are back, with their old friend Arthur Brown as support. Despite multiple costume changes, tonight there is no ritualistic donning of a flaming headdress during Brown's totemic 1968 hit *Fire*. Why rely on gimmickry? Astonishingly, even at 81 years of age his voice is still present and correct, including that deeply scary falsetto. It's all rather alarming… in the nicest way possible.

While it seems entirely reasonable that ticket buyers for a show billed as "an evening of Sonic Destruction, celebrating the Rituals and Odysseys of Space on the 50th anniversary of their acclaimed Space Ritual album" should expect to hear Hawkwind's newly reissued live double album from 1973 in its entirety, what we actually get is a clutch of *Space Ritual* selections amid a traditional career-encompassing Hawks show, largely enhanced by oscillating slabs of noise from producer and musician William Orbit and a laser show that could probably be seen from Pluto.

Although some who object to the programme's detail get their knickers in an almighty twist, ultimately it matters little. They should know by now that with Captain Dave Brock, still incredibly sprightly at 82, continuing to man the tiller, nothing on Planet Hawkwind is ever predictable.

Dave Ling

MAIN: MARIA LAURA ANTONELLI/SHUTTERSTOCK; INSETS: DARRELL MAYHEW

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Atack's founder member and lead guitarist Keith Atack has a long pedigree in the rock music scene. He has also toured with many pop acts like Bonnie Tyler, Rick Astley and many others. Keith has a rock / funk / soul style as well as a jazz and blues influences. He is joined by band members that also have strong roots in the rock scene such as Bob Richards on drums who has rubbed shoulders with members of bands like Iron Maiden, Survivor, Asia and Shy. Bassist Chris Childs is well respected and is the bass player with UK stalwarts "Thunder/ Lonerider/Tyketto", he is an ideal addition to the line-up along with seasoned vocalist Lee Small (Shy/Phenomena/Lionheart and many more). Finishing off the quintet is Nick Foley whose keyboard prowess is ever present throughout the album. The sound of the Hammond for which he is known gives the whole album a feel of Deep Purple and Rainbow with a true classic British Rock sound.

"Nine Lives" is an exciting addition to the Escape Music roster and available in limited edition vinyl and CD formats, something very much to look forward to.

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Distributed via Cargo Records UK

'The set is a master class in tightly wound 21st-century rock'n'roll.'

Rather than fancy staging, Jay Buchanan and Scott Holiday are Rival Sons' visual focus.

Rival Sons

London The Roundhouse

Back in the city "where it all started for us", the sharp-dressed Californians' rock'n'roll fire still burns bright.

★ 'Rival Sons, Long Beach, CA', read the writing on the front of T-shirts for sale on the merch stand, but it may as well have read 'Rival Sons, London, England'. It's here in the capital that these modern electric warriors played their first ever gig outside of the US. Specifically at the tiny Barfly, a coin's toss across the road from tonight's venue. A hundred people at most watched them back then. Tonight there are 10 times that. London caught them early and hasn't let go.

"London's where it all started for us," says singer Jay Buchanan midway through the show, acknowledging the link. "We've done a lot of growing up in this town. We've done a lot of fucking around too."

That may have been the case in the past, but there's no fucking around in evidence tonight. Instead, Rival Sons' 90-minute set is a master class in tightly wound 21st-century rock'n'roll. The building blocks of songs such as *Do Your Worst, Electric Man* and *Pressure And Time* may be traditional, but their energy is right now.

The four-piece aren't big on flashy stage trappings. Their only concessions to theatricality are a big backdrop featuring the band's logo and some vividly atmospheric lighting. Instead the visual focus is split between Buchanan and guitarist Scott Holiday. The former is a spindly, Jagger-esque figure in red waistcoat, red flares and no shoes. With his wide-brimmed black hat, black suit and black facial hair, the latter looks more like an Old West gunslinger than a guitarist. It's a yin-yang/odd couple approach that's been done a million times before, but it's effective. Sometimes the old ways are the best.

Strictly speaking, Rival Sons haven't had any actual hits, but if they did then the set would be packed with them: *Do Your Worst* and *Electric Man* are as coiled as an angry rattlesnake, while tonight *Open My Eyes* sounds both leaner and heavier than it did when it came out a decade ago.

There's nothing in tonight's set from their not-quite-there-yet debut *Before The Fire* or 2016's uncharacteristically dreary *Hollow Bones*, but they pepper it with songs from this year's dazzling *Darkfighter*, including an electrifying *Mirrors* (tonight's opener) and the high-kicking *Bird In The Hand*. There's also a handful of songs from the equally fantastic *Lightbringer*, not least the exultant *Mercy*, a perfectly poised exercise in push-pull between Holiday's throaty riff and Buchanan's raw-throated wail, proving that the tunes have got bigger and the grooves have got tighter.

Rival Sons long ago transcended those early influences that seemed glued to them: Zeppelin, Free and the rest. But as great as they are, there are moments when they could do with letting go a little bit more and stretching out. *Feral Roots* is as good as anything their forebears recorded; imagine how great it would be stretched to its allotted time on stage. Similarly, Holiday's extended guitar solo at the end of a triumphant *Face Of Light* suggests that the world is missing an old-school double live album with Rival Sons' name on it.

They wrap it up with *Shooting Stars*, performed here by a solo Buchanan as a stark, defiant plea for peace in a crazy world, and *Keep On Swinging*, still the most coiled rock'n'roll song of the past 15 years. Greta Van Fleet may have stolen a little of their thunder in recent years, but the flame still burns in Rival Sons' hands.
Dave Everley

COLIN HART / CAMERA PRESS

The Soundtrack Of My Life

KK's Priest guitarist **KK Downing** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him

Interview: **Dave Ling**

Born in West Bromwich in 1951, KK Downing was a member of Judas Priest from 1969 to 2011, and his guitar partnership with Glenn Tipton was a defining element of the band's ever-anthemic brand of heavy metal. Last year Downing was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame with the group. Currently he leads his own band, KK's Priest.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

You Really Got Me by The Kinks, back in 1964. I remember thinking: "Why do I like this? Aren't The Kinks supposed to be a pop band?" Later on I realised that I loved *You Really Got Me* because it was a riff song. That riff got you up and out of your chair, didn't it?

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

Before Priest, I joined a pop band. We did weddings and stuff. My debut gig would have been in a Working Men's Club. It may not have been the first song of the night, but I remember we did *Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Ole Oak Tree* [a 1973 hit for Tony Orlando & Dawn]. I wish I still had the set-list. I'd probably choke.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

It's got to be *Electric Ladyland*. I was already a Hendrix fan when it came out [in 1968], and I just loved it. *Electric Ladyland* was pretty eclectic, and it gripped me. I used to shut the curtains, put on the headphones, drop the needle and not move a muscle till the final note.

THE GUITAR HERO

Without a doubt it's Hendrix again. He was the all-in-one package. Jimi was a brilliant musician, he wrote incredible songs, and he sang as well. Nobody before or since was as charismatic.

THE SINGER

The guy that really, really impressed me early on was Ian Gillan. *Deep Purple In Rock*, and particularly the song *Child In Time* when Gillan hit those high notes. That's why when I found Rob Halford, who could do the same thing and lived not too far away, it was a dream come true.

THE SONGWRITER

Again, and I'm sorry about this, I'll say Jimi Hendrix. Hearing Jimi Hendrix was my first good healthy dose of heavy metal. Those riffs – *Foxy Lady* and *Purple Haze* – were something completely new.

THE CULT HERO

Leslie West. His albums with Mountain were so important for an army of guitar players. He had such a brilliant guitar tone. *Theme For An Imaginary Western*, which was written by Jack Bruce and Pete Brown [on 1970's *Climbing!*] had a wonderful solo that consisted of maybe four or five notes.

THE BEST RECORD I MADE

[Laughing] No apologies, I must pick my albums by KK's Priest: *Sermons Of The Sinner* [2021] and the new one, *Sinner Rides Again*. They're both very, very kick-ass and I'm proud of them both. They epitomise everything about me and who I am. They continue my legacy [with Judas Priest] and carry the hallmarks of the past.

THE WORST RECORD I MADE

Jesus, I'll have to go with [Judas Priest's 1981 album] *Point Of Entry*. But then again there are some great songs on that one. That's so, so hard to answer.

THE BEST LIVE BAND I'VE SEEN

Once again, Jimi Hendrix. The most memorable of all the times I saw him was at the Coventry Theatre in 1967. That concert will stay with me till the day I die.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

This might shock you, but I really love Leonard Cohen's first album [*Songs Of Leonard Cohen*]. I was dating a girl who owned it, and I was surprised to realise that it had some stuff for me. His right-hand picking technique was wonderful.

THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

They've been together for fifty years, but I'll pick Wishbone Ash. They were rated at the time, though maybe not so much any more, I guess. I only grew to like them in the last years ten years or so, but nobody could deny that they were so influential.

THE BEST LIVE ALBUM

I'd like to say [Judas Priest's] *Unleashed In The East*, but another that jumps out at me is *Tokyo Tapes* by the Scorpions. I liked that one a lot when it came out [in 1978]. It had Uli Jon Roth doing his Hendrix-y thing, and some amazing songs.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

Anything by AC/DC. They always get me pumped up and ready to rock. Nobody does it better.

THE ANTHEM

It's got to be Twisted Sister. I saw them a few years ago, and when they played *We're Not Gonna Take It* the crowd just went ballistic.

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

I'll go back to that Leonard Cohen album I just mentioned, for *Suzanne*. It worked then, so why shouldn't it work now?

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

I'd be happy with *Purple Haze*, the song that made me pledge my soul to what became heavy metal.

The Sinner Rides Again is out now via Napalm.

"Jimi was the all-in-one package. Nobody before or since was as charismatic."

K.K. DOWNING: ADAM GASSON; JIMI HENDRIX: GETTY

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